



The Kite Runner

by Khaled Hosseini



The performance of *The Kite Runner* is a dramatization of scenes from Khaled Hosseini's novel of the same name. The words spoken by actor Arian Moayed come directly from the book; though some of the text has been cut or rearranged, nothing has been added that does not appear in the book. The one actor portrays all of the characters that appear in the part of the novel included in the performance.

The performance takes place on a stage that is bare except for a stool draped with a piece of Afghani cloth. Authentic Afghan *rubab* (an instrument similar to a lute) music is played before and after the show. Otherwise, it's just the actor, the script, and the audience's imagination that bring the story to life.

The Kite Runner is told from the point of view of Amir, a young man from a prosperous Afghan family. As an adult living in the U.S., Amir is troubled by guilt over an incident that happened when he was a child living in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1975. Finding himself in a difficult situation, he betrayed his best friend, Hassan, the son of his father's servant. The story is set against a backdrop of tumultuous events, from the fall of the monarchy in Afghanistan through the Soviet invasion, the mass exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the Taliban regime.

The performance does not cover the entire novel, but focuses on events from chapters 1-8.

Meet the Actor

Arian Moayed is an actor, writer, and director. He is a co-founder of the award-winning theater company, Waterwell, where he has worked on productions of *Choo! Choo!*, *In On It*, *Lost in Yemen*, *Fuenteovejuna*, *Chill & Serve*, and *Sweetness & Light*. His other New York theater credits include the premieres of *American Pilot* at Manhattan Theater Club and Jeff Daniels' *Apartment 3A*, Glyn O'Malley's *Paradise*, Betty Shaimah's *Again and Against*, and Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (BAM). Outside of New York, Arian has performed in *Homebody/Kabul* (Steppenwolf) and *As You Like It* and *Othello* (Utah Shakespearean Festival) His film and television appearances include *Law & Order*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *Phileine Says Sorry*, *Sex and the City*, *Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn*, and *Late Nite with Conan O'Brien*. Look for him in Spike Lee's upcoming TV series, *M.O.N.Y.* Arian also reads for National Public Radio's *Selected Shorts*.



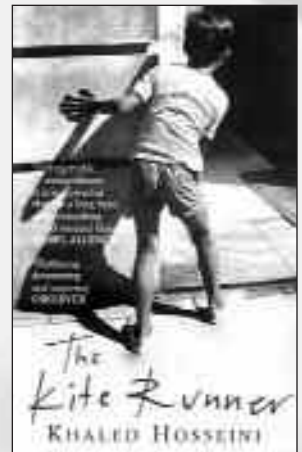
Adaptation: Page to Stage

The performance covers only parts of the book. What criteria might the adapters have used in deciding what to include and what to leave out? Do you think they made good choices?

If you were hired to turn *The Kite Runner* into a stage play or movie, how would you adapt it? In your adaptation, would you tell any of the story from the point of view of any of the characters besides Amir? Would you add any scenes that are not in the book? Leave anything out? Why?

Judging a Book by Its Cover

Take a look at the cover of *The Kite Runner* at your local library or online. (There have been several different covers,



including the one at right.) Is there a picture or an image on the cover? What do these images mean to you? Do these images make you want to read the book or give you an idea of what it is about?

Why did Khaled Hosseini choose this title? Which character does it refer to? Does the title give you insight into the story? What other words or phrases are on the cover?

Create a poster or book cover for *The Kite Runner*. You can cut images out of magazines and newspapers or draw them. What words and images will you include and why?

What Happens in the Play?

Amir, a 38-year-old Afghan man living in the U.S., looks back on a disturbing incident that took place when he was 12 years old and living with his father in Kabul, Afghanistan. Though he has tried to forget what happened, he continues to be haunted by guilt. He tells his story in flashback.

As a boy in the 1960s, the young Amir enjoys a life of privilege. He is a Pashtun, the ruling tribal group in eastern and southern Afghanistan. His best friend, Hassan, is the son of the family servant Ali. Ali and Hassan are Hazara, a minority tribe that has suffered severe ethnic discrimination under the Pashtuns. Hassan worships Amir and defends him from Assef, a big, cruel boy who believes in the racist ideas of Adolph Hitler.

A shy child who is bad at sports, Amir believes that he is a failure in his father's eyes. Striving to win his father's approval, he places all his hopes on winning a kite-flying tournament—a popular challenge in which participants use the glass-coated strings of their kites to cut down the other kites. Amir wins the tournament and sends Hassan, the “kite runner,” to get the last kite that he has brought down.

On his way back with the kite, Hassan is brutally assaulted by Assef in a back alley. From hiding, Amir watches the attack but is too frightened to try to help his friend. He runs away, and when he sees Hassan a short time later he pretends not to know what happened. Amir's cowardice marks a turning point in the relationship between the two boys.

Both Pashtuns and Hazaras are Muslims; the Pashtuns are predominantly Sunni, while Hazaras are predominantly Shiite.

Characters in the Performance

The following characters speak or are mentioned in the play.

AMIR - the narrator of the story; a young Afghani man from a prominent Pashtun family

HASSAN - a Hazara boy, friend and servant of Amir. He has a harelip, a type of facial deformity.

BABA - Amir's father

ALI - a Hazara man, one of Baba's servants. He is believed to be Hassan's father, until Hassan's true parentage is revealed later in the book.

SANAUBAR - Hassan's mother, who ran away right after he was born

ASSEF - a Pashtun boy (his mother is German) who bullies Amir and Hassan

WALI & KAMAL - friends of Assef who help him assault Hassan

A MERCHANT

RAHIM KHAN - Baba's best friend and business partner

Getting Under the Characters' Skin

Working with three or four of your classmates, pick one character that you were introduced to in the performance of *The Kite Runner*. Create an outline of a body by drawing it onto a large sheet of posterboard or kraft paper. This represents the character you have chosen.



On the inside of the body, write words or phrases that capture the internal world of your character—thoughts, feelings, emotions, history, or anything that takes place internally. On the outside of the body, write words or phrases that capture the external world of the character—including what people think of this character, what this character shows to the world, the physical appearance of the character, external influences or environment, other people and situations that the character interacts with, and anything else external.

After your group has completed your outline, tape it on the wall. Present and explain your character outline to the rest of the class. Let them ask questions about your character. Does everyone else see your character in the same way your group did?

Meet the Author

The oldest of five children, Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. His mother was a teacher of Farsi and history at a large girls' high school in Kabul. His father was a diplomat, and when he was posted to the Afghan Embassy in Paris in 1976 he moved there with his entire family. In 1980, following the 1978 coup and Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the United States granted the Hosseini family political asylum. They moved to San Jose, California. Khaled Hosseini attended Santa Clara University and graduated from the UC San Diego School of Medicine. He has been in practice as an internist since 1996. He is married and has two children (a boy and a girl, Haris and Farah). *The Kite Runner* is his first novel.



Formative Moments

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.

In this excerpt from *The Kite Runner*, Amir describes a moment from his childhood that formed his adult self. Think back over things that happened to you when you were younger. What is the one event or moment in your childhood that you predict you'll look back on when you're 40 years old and say, "That's the moment that made me the person I am today."?

Then write down on a piece of paper:

1. "I became what I am today at the age of _____."
2. "I remember the precise moment. I was with _____."
3. "What happened was _____."
4. "At the time it happened, I felt _____."
5. "Looking back now, I realize that the reason I am _____ today is because of that event."

Fill in the blanks with the details of your formative moment. Do not put your name on the paper. Have your teacher collect all the papers in your class and re-distribute them so that everyone ends up with someone else's formative moment.

Using the information you've been given, write a poem or short story based on the formative moment in the life of one of your classmates.

Dear Friends,
Many readers see my novel, *The Kite Runner*, as a book about Afghanistan, a story of its violent recent past, its tragedies and upheavals, its rich culture and resilient people. They tell me that this book opened for them an intimate window into my troubled homeland, and that news stories about Afghanistan suddenly registered with them on a deep and personal level. They ask me if this was my intent in writing this book. And I tell them it was. But not that first day, in March of 2001, when I sat to write the opening words of this book. For me, writing has always been, first and foremost, about storytelling. *The Kite Runner* came about simply because I was bewitched by a story. A story of guilt and redemption, brutality and kindness, sin and forgiveness, a story of the doomed friendship between two boys, one rich, one poor, one flawed, the other pure, with Afghanistan and her own tale of brutality and kindness as the backdrop. It was always, first and last, about story. And stage has always been a unique and powerful medium for storytelling, direct and intimate, organic and spontaneous. And so I thank The American Place Theatre for selecting the story of Amir and Hassan, two boys who lived in my mind and are dear to my heart. I am grateful and thrilled. Thank you for honoring me with this performance.

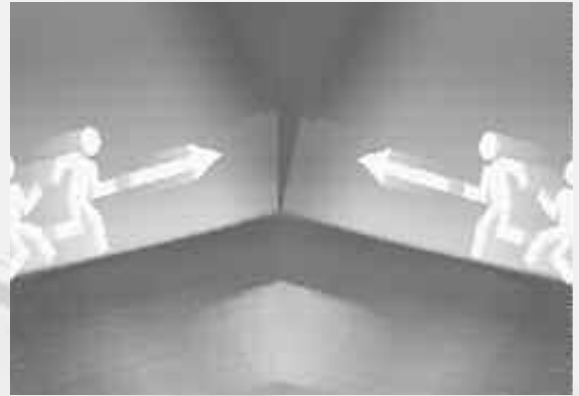
—Khaled Hosseini

Letter written to The American Place Theatre - April 12, 2005

Before the Show: Yes, No, Maybe

Divide your classroom into three equal sections. Designate the center area “Maybe” (or “Not Sure”), and the sides as “Yes” and “No.” When your teacher reads each of the following questions, move to the part of the room that best represents your answer, moving farther from the center depending on how strong your opinion is either “yes” or “no.”

- Do you think that you have much in common with a student of your age living in Afghanistan?
- Have you ever had a good friend who was in a different economic class than you?
- Have you ever had a good friend who was in a different ethnic or racial group than you?
- Have you ever had a secret you didn't share with anyone?
- Have you ever formed an opinion about someone based on their skin color, clothing, or accent?
- Have you ever regretted a choice that you made?
- Have you ever felt like a “bad person”?
- Do you think all people have flaws?



Before the Show: Circle of Questions

Divide your class in half: Group A and Group B. Group A forms a circle in the middle of the room. Then Group B forms a circle around them. The people in Group A then turn around to stand face-to-face with someone in Group B. Begin by introducing yourself to your partner (the person standing in front of you from the opposite group).

1. Tell your partner whether you think you will enjoy the reading/viewing *The Kite Runner* based on its title and what you know about it so far, and why. Then let your partner answer the same question.
2. Everyone in Group B moves one space to the right. Introduce yourself to your new partner.
3. You and your partner tell each other about a childhood friend that you no longer speak to. How and why did you grow apart?
4. Everyone in Group A moves three spaces to the left. Introduce yourself to your new partner.
5. You and your partner tell each other about a choice that you made that you now regret.
6. Everyone in Group B moves five spaces to the left. Introduce yourself to your new partner.
7. You and your partner tell each other about a relative that you admire and why.
8. Everyone in Group A moves one space to the right. Introduce yourself to your new partner.
9. You and your partner tell each other about a time that you lied about something. Do you regret the lie or do you believe it had to be done?



Afghanistan and Its Culture

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, sharing its borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, China to the northeast, Pakistan to the east and south, and Iran to the west. The country's official languages are Pashtu and Dari Persian. The population of about 30 million people is roughly 42% Pashtun, 27% Tajik, 9% Hazara, and 9% Uzbek, with the remaining population divided among Aimaq, Turkmen, Baluch, and other small groups. Outside the capital city of Kabul, Afghanistan is still largely a tribal society. Religion and traditional customs have a strong influence within the family, and there are strict male and female roles in society.

You can call the people of Afghanistan either "Afghan" or "Afghani."



"Batcha" (Afghani boy), by Joe Hoyt

What Do Afghans Like to Do?

KITES: In Afghanistan, kite flying is an art and sport at the same time. Kite makers take pride in creating kites that can reach up to five feet in size. The line attached to the kite is covered with glue and a fine powder of ground glass. As the challengers loft their kites high into the sky, the goal becomes to cross lines and cut the opponent's kite string with a sawing motion. Children love to chase the falling kites, which they get to keep. Under the Taliban, making or flying kites was forbidden—children were even executed for violating this law.

MUSIC: Afghans adore music—playing at weddings, outdoors, or whenever they can. During the rule of the Taliban, a harsh ban was imposed on music, with people subject to imprisonment or even execution for playing, owning, or listening to music. Now that the Taliban no longer rule, music, folk dances, and celebrations take place as before.

FOOD: Afghani cuisine has been influenced by the cooking of Persia (Iran), India, and Mongolia. Vegetable dishes, rice, meat stews or kebabs, and a flatbread called *nan* are all part of the menu. Cardamom tea is always served along with a refreshing yogurt drink called *doogh* on hot days. Desserts such as fresh or dried fruits, nuts, sugared almonds, or chickpeas are nibbled on before meals or with tea.

OTHER PASTIMES: Afghans enjoy storytelling, dancing, and children's games such as marbles. They like to spend their weekends with family and friends going to public parks or to the countryside to enjoy the beautiful surroundings and to have picnics. Their national sport is *buzkashi*, which dates back to the 13th century. This rough, fast-paced game is similar to polo; it is played on horseback, but uses the carcass of a goat or calf instead of a ball! Other sports popular in Afghanistan are soccer, boxing, volleyball, and basketball.



Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet, came from Balkh, part of modern-day Afghanistan.



"Bustop," by Joe Hoyt

Afghanistan Timeline, Part I

7

50,000-20,000 BCE: Archaeological evidence indicates human civilization is beginning to thrive in the area that will become known as Afghanistan.

500 BCE: Persian leader Darius the Great extends his empire into modern-day Afghanistan.

329 BCE: Alexander the Great conquers Persia and Afghanistan. Greek rule continues in much of the area during the next two centuries, although unrest and revolts are common.

50 AD: The Kushan empire and its Buddhist doctrines, begin to establish themselves in the region.

550: After years of relative independence, Persian forces reassert control over the area but continue to face intermittent revolts from native Afghan tribes.

652: Arabs introduce the region to Islam, a religion that will eventually become dominant.

962: The Islamic era begins with the Ghaznavid Dynasty, founded by Turks and giving rise to Afghanistan's emerging role politically and culturally in Islamic civilization.

1030: The Ghaznavid empire begins to fall apart after the death of Mahmud Ghazni.

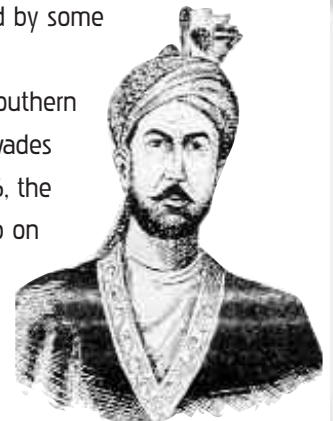
1370: A series of ventures to seize power, competing kingdoms and intermittent revolts mark the 14th and 15th centuries.

1504: Babur, a founder of India's Moghul dynasty, takes control of Kabul and, in time, much of modern-day Afghanistan. Moghul rule introduces another religion, Hinduism, to the country and sets off more attempted nationalist revolts.

1600s: On the heels of the nationalist movement of the previous century led by Bayazid Roshan, another nationalist-minded revolt—this one headed by Afghan warrior-poet Khushhal Khan Khattak—begins against the Moghul government in the late 1600s.



1708: Mir Wais Khan Hotak, considered by some the father of Afghan independence, successfully takes over Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. His son, Mir Mahmud, invades Persia and liberates Herat. But by 1736, the Persians start to re-establish their grip on the region.



Mir Wais

1750s: Ahmad Shah Durrani begins his rule, consolidating and enlarging Afghanistan while also governing much of India. But peace will be the exception over the next 100 years, as local leaders fend off Persian and Sikh invasions and fight amongst themselves.

1836: The British, in corroboration with ex-king Shah Shuja, invade Afghanistan in response to growing Russian and Persian influence in the region. Afghan forces fight fervently against British forces, and by 1843 the nation reasserts its independence.

1878: The British launch their second war against Afghanistan, but withdraw in the face of strong resistance two years later.

1885: Russian forces seize territory in northern Afghanistan. The Russians will keep most of the area, but thereafter pledge to respect Afghanistan's territorial integrity. Eight years later, another boundary agreement—this one between Afghanistan and British India—leaves several Afghan tribal areas in what is now Pakistan.



Babur

Afghanistan Timeline, Part II

1921: A third Anglo-Afghan war breaks out after anti-British forces assassinate the king. But by 1919, the war-weary British relinquish control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs. The new king, Amanullah, establishes diplomatic relations with several major nations and introduces reforms aimed at modernizing the country. But the moves alienate many tribal and religious leaders and generate political turmoil.

1949: Afghanistan's parliament refuses to recognize new boundaries drawn by Great Britain establishing an independent Pakistan.

1973: Daoud Khan and the Afghan Communist Party overthrow the ruling Afghan government and long-time king Mohammad Zahir Shah. Daoud abolishes the monarchy, presents a new constitution, ousts suspected opponents from the government and institutes economic and social reforms.



Daoud Khan

1978: Daoud is killed and his government falls in a communist-backed coup. Mass killings, arrests and tortures ensue, and the Afghan guerrilla (Mujahideen) movement is born.

1979: Anti-communist forces take control, prompting a Soviet invasion.

1984: The Mujahideen, known by supporters as "freedom fighters," begin receiving military and logistical assistance from the United States and other countries.

1988: The Soviet Union and United States sign the Geneva Accords, calling for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the return of refugees without fear of persecution. But the Mujahideen do not take part in the negotiations, and do not accept it.

1992: The Mujahideen take over Kabul and declare Afghanistan liberated. They form an Islamic state, headed by the Islamic Jihad Council and Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani.

1994: The Taliban militia is born and begins to rise up against Rabbani's government and its supporters. Over the next several years, the group will become the nation's dominant political force, although by 2001 only three other countries recognized its legitimacy.

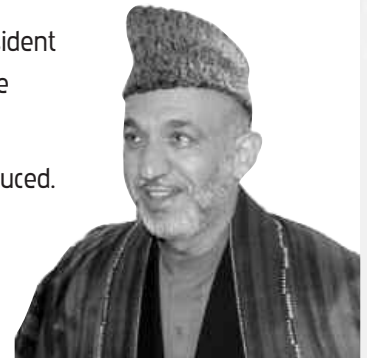
1996: The Taliban, an extremist group of Sunni Muslims, gains control of Kabul. By the end of 2000, they have captured 95% of Afghanistan. They impose a strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law and become supporters of terrorists, including Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network.

2001: Following the September 11 attacks, the United States launches a military campaign to destroy the Al-Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban. An Afghanistan interim government is formed.

2002: Hamid Karzai becomes President and peacekeeping forces enter the country.

2004: A new constitution is introduced.

2005: The National Assembly becomes the first freely-elected legislature in Afghanistan since 1973. For the first time, women participate in government as voters, candidates, and elected members.



Hamid Karzai

2006: NATO takes control of American forces in Afghanistan.

2007: Taliban incursions into the country increase. The United States is forced to consider increasing its troop levels and extending tours of duty for its troops.

Looking at Ideas About Afghanistan and Beyond

What images or words come to mind when you think of "Afghanistan"? Would you consider these images or words to be stereotypes, or true to reality?

Make a "cultural map" of your classroom, showing all the countries that members of your class come from. What are the ideas and images that your class thinks of regarding each of the countries on the map? Do your classmates express any stereotypical ideas about your family's country of origin? Where do you think these ideas come from? Are they positive or negative? How would you go about changing the negative stereotypes?

Know Your Part.

As a member of the audience, you are a crucial part of the performance. Before you arrive at the theater, make sure you know your role.

- When you enter the theater, follow an usher to your seat.
- Once the house lights (the lights in the part of the theater where the audience is sitting) go down, focus all your attention on the stage.
- At a live theater performance, activities you're used to doing while watching television at home will disturb the performers and other people in the audience. So during the show, you should not be talking, eating, chewing gum, using a cell phone or game device, or listening to music. Remain in your seat with all your attention focused on the performance.
- Don't bring cameras, camcorders, tape recorders, or any other recording equipment to the performance. You're not allowed to use them.
- If something in the show is funny, go ahead and laugh. And of course, feel free to applaud at the end of the performance if you liked what you saw!
- After the performers are finished taking their bows, stay in your seat until your group gets the signal to leave the theater.



Learn More.

BOOKS:

Afghanistan: The Land that Was, photographs by Sabrina & Roland Michaud, introduction by Andr Velter. Harry N. Abrams, 2002

Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics, by Martin Ewans. Harper Perennial, 2002

Current Controversies—Afghanistan, edited by Jann Einfeld. Greenhaven Press, 2005

Love and War in Afghanistan, by Alexander Klaitis & Gulchin Gulmamadova-Klaitis. Seven Stories Press, 2006

The Magnificent Book of Kites: Explorations in Design, Construction, Enjoyment, and Flight, by Maxwell Eden. Sterling, 2002

ON THE NET:

Afghan Dot Net: news, history, poetry, religion, customs, and more
<http://afghanan.net>

Afghanistan in Photos
<http://canajun.com/rmcguire/travel/asia/afghanistan/>

Afghanistan Online: history, cultural information, links, and more
www.afghan-web.com

Embassy of Afghanistan
www.embassyofafghanistan.org

National Geographic: Afghanistan
www.nationalgeographic.com/landincrisis

Official Website of Khaled Hosseini
www.khaledhosseini.com

key notes

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