



RIVERHEAD BOOKS

Dear Educator,

Teachers from across the country have written to me in the past year, facing pressure because they teach Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. In some cases, their jobs were being threatened over their decision to bring this seminal book into their classrooms. That's where the idea for this kit came from: to offer resources for teaching *The Kite Runner* and explaining its value to those who are questioning it.

Enclosed are discussion questions from literary celebrities, testimonials from educators, a map of places in the United States where the novel is taught (spoiler alert: in all fifty states), and a passionate letter from Khaled Hosseini himself. Whether the debate is occurring at school board meetings, libraries, or in classrooms, we hope this kit will provide you with ammunition in your defense of this remarkable book.

As book bans continue to suppress voices, censor ideas, and limit freedom of expression in cities and towns across the country, we remain grateful to you for your service and your example.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey Kloske
President and Publisher
Riverhead Books

A STATEMENT FROM AUTHOR **KHALED HOSSEINI**

Inside a drawer in my office desk sits a stash of manilla envelopes. Inside each are some of the letters I have collected over a span of nearly twenty years from high school students across the U.S. In these writings, the students share with me, often quite poignantly, what impact reading *The Kite Runner* has had on their lives. For some, the book is a clarion call to stand up to bullies, to defy intolerance. Others hear familiar echoes in Amir's strained bond with his father, in his struggles to measure up. Yet others—perhaps inspired by the book's de facto tagline, “there is a way to be good again”—speak of the desire to volunteer, learn more, be more tolerant of others, mend broken ties, muster the courage to do the right and just thing, no matter how difficult.

For many students, those who write me as well as the many I have met at high schools across the country, *The Kite Runner* is their first window into Afghan culture. Most openly admit to once knowing little about the country outside its media depiction as a violent, unhappy land perpetually wracked by war and misery. But because they find in the story of Amir and Hassan resonant parallels to their own lives—around friendship, family, love, courage, cowardice—Afghanistan becomes a real place. They gain a more nuanced and compassionate perspective on the country and its people, and they express gratitude for it.

Perhaps the most recurring word I hear from students is “empathy.” It isn't surprising. Studies have shown that reading fiction improves the ability to intuit and understand the feelings of other human beings. Books remain our most powerful teachers of empathy. They remind us of our immutable connections as a species sharing this planet. They open the world to us. They help us feel less alone and find solace in one another. Their gift is immeasurable. Stripping students of this gift is a tragic mistake.

Hearing from high school students in their own words, in person and in letter, has convinced me that they are more than sophisticated and mature enough to digest and contextualize the themes raised by *The Kite Runner*. They are appropriately and constructively challenged by the book. And they are more than up to the task, learning valuable lessons about injustice, discrimination, tyranny, and the perils of religious extremism.

I am a parent myself. I understand the parental impulse to safeguard our children from harm. But banning books like *The Kite Runner* doesn't “protect” students at all. It betrays them instead. It robs them of the chance that we as parents and instructors owe them, the chance to broaden their human community, to let them walk the world in another's shoes for a while, to foster empathy for others, to be challenged by the experience and perhaps take a small step toward becoming fuller, richer versions of themselves.

THE KITE RUNNER TEACHING GUIDE

Books broaden our minds, deepen our imaginations, and add to our humanity. Unfortunately, we live in an age when literature is increasingly under threat. For this teaching guide, we enlisted some of our finest contemporary authors to contribute questions about the artistic choices Khaled Hosseini makes, in hopes of spurring discussion about the moral and artistic necessity of representing unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and even difficult experiences in fiction.

CELESTE NG author of *Little Fires Everywhere* asks:

Along with its themes of family, friendship, and forgiveness, *The Kite Runner* also shows upsetting moments of violence, which can be difficult to read. Why do you think the author made the choice to include material which might make the reader uncomfortable? Do you agree with that decision?

Would the novel be different without these upsetting moments? Does witnessing an intense or upsetting experience for a character change your understanding of what they are going through, or what is at stake for them in the story?

SARAH VOWELL author of *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* asks:

Some characters in the novel use slurs about women and gay men. Does this mean that the author, Khaled Hosseini, condones such language? And if not, what is the point of characters using this language? Should fictional dialogue reflect the language of the streets?

In *The Kite Runner*, parental expectations and biases motivate the main character's actions. How do Baba's ideas about what it means to be a man influence Amir's decision making? In what ways does Amir resist his father's ideals of manhood, and in what ways does he accept them?

How do the historical power struggles between Pastuns and Hazaras, as well as the war and upheaval in 1970s Afghanistan, affect the novel's two intertwined families?

MOHSIN HAMID author of *Exit West* asks:

In addition to everything else, *The Kite Runner* is a novel about leaving one's country, and returning after a long absence. After being away for many years, is it ever possible for us to return to a home we have left? Or are the places of our past changed so much by the passage of time, that they become new places?

JACQUELINE WOODSON author of *Red at the Bone* asks:

Our relationship to the past can change over time. The many places we journey to—college, other states and countries, the worlds of friends and extended family—can stretch and expand our understanding of where we have come from and who we are. Consider examples from your own life that reflect this idea. What do you think happens to the old ideas and versions of ourselves, as we grow older?

NICK HORNBY author of *High Fidelity* asks:

What is Amir's worst crime? In your opinion, has he made amends by the end of the book? Can we ever really repair the damage we have done to people?

TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

The Kite Runner has encouraged many dynamic and reflective classroom discussions on friendship, power, and forgiveness—all building empathy in my young adult readers. It is a story that allows students to delve into the complexities of the parent-child relationship and reflect on how young people engage with others as they discover their own places in our complicated world. **It is a narrative that stands the test of time precisely because it is not a perfect story. The characters are not perfect. They do not always make the best choices. Trust is destroyed. For these reasons our student readers engage with the characters of this novel beyond the surface level.** Novels like *The Kite Runner* give students opportunities to reflect on issues of integrity, identity, and responsibility. This is why we read literature. Complex and engaging stories help readers understand relationships in more nuanced and empathetic ways. Reading, discussing, and writing about the complex relationships of *The Kite Runner* helps young adults read, recognize, and respond to more complex characters in their reading experiences as well as in their own lives.

—Jennifer A. Ward, High School English Teacher, Grandville, Michigan

LIBRARIAN TESTIMONIAL

***The Kite Runner* is one of the most intergenerational successes I know as a librarian.** It's an easy recommendation to colleagues when they are looking for a dazzling read. It never fails that these fellow teachers want to talk about this extraordinary book, that they pass it on to others. Our students start to perk up—what are we talking about so animatedly? Why are we chattering about people they don't know, this Amir and Hassan? Of course, we share. It's our job to guide them. And when our students read the novel and join the conversation, it's a lovely full circle: grownups and teenagers now immersed in this world across the ocean, this friendship over time, this father and son whose love is so deeply earned.

—Mira Johnson, High School Librarian, Southold, New York

***THE KITE RUNNER* HAS BEEN TAUGHT IN EVERY STATE IN THE UNITED STATES**



**THE KITE RUNNER IS TAUGHT
THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES
A PARTIAL LIST**

Folsom, CA
Austin, TX
Fredericksburg, VA
Newberg, Oregon
Salem, MA
Kirksville, MO
New Haven, CT
Philadelphia, PA
Kansas City, MO
Livermore, CA
Boston, MA
Mesa, AZ
Bakersfield, CA
Dallas, Texas
Queens, NY
Pittsburg, CA
Quincy, IL
Harrisonburg, VA
College Station, TX
Saint Joseph, MO
Santa Monica, CA
Ithaca, NY
La Plata, Maryland
San Bruno, CA
Pleasant Hill, CA
Woodbridge, VA
Keene, NH
Baltimore, MD

Newark, NJ
Lawrenceville, NJ
Stamford, CT
Saint Louis, MO
Dyersburg, TN
Baton Rouge, LA
Denton, TX
Harrisburg, PA
Sioux Falls, SD
Cincinnati, OH
Monroe, LA
Brevard, NC
Clarksville, TN
Springfield, IL
Wichita, KS
Big Rapids, MI
Clarion, PA
Greenville, NC
Washington DC
Wilmington, OH
Allentown, PA
Caldwell, NJ
San Jose, CA
DeLand, FL
Kent, OH
Erie, PA
Midland, MI
McKeesport, PA

Immaculata Dr, PA
Fairfield ME
Pittsburgh, PA
Flagstaff, AZ
Ada, OH
Radnor, PA
Bronx, NY
Bethlehem, PA
San Antonio, TX
Fairfield, CT
Fitchburg, MA
Villanova, PA
Omaha, NE
Russellville, AR
Reading, PA
Weatherford, OK
Memphis, TN
Nampa, ID
Bozeman, MT
Tulsa, OK
La Mirada, CA
Homewood, AL
Atlanta, GA
Brooklyn, NY
Old Westbury, NY
Lynn, MA
Cleveland, OH
University Center, MI

Lemoore, CA
Durham, NC
Sault Ste. Marie, MI
Nashua, NH
Mendocino, CA
Thibodaux, LA
El Cajon, CA
Portland, OR
Union, NJ
Bridgewater, MA
Muncie, IN
White Bear Lake, MN
Framingham, MA
Cambridge, MA
Claremore, OK
Visalia, CA
Pullman, WA
Greeley, CO
Las Vegas, NV
La Crosse, WI
Santa Clarita, CA
New Britain, CT
Reno, NV
Moorpark, CA
Pasadena, CA
Purchase, NY
Fresno, CA
Detroit, MI
Stockton, CA
Tigerville, SC
San Francisco, CA
Brentwood, NY
Midland, MI
St Cloud, MN
Walnut, CA

Merced, CA
Troy, NY
Montclair, NJ
Slippery Rock, PA
Kennesaw, GA
Newark, DE
Santa Barbara, CA
Fort Worth, TX
Athens, GA
Binghamton, NY
Lansing, MI
Lafayette, LA
Bowie, MD
Evansville, IN
Texarkana, TX
West Lafayette, IN
Mequon, WI
Teaneck, NJ
Blythe, CA
Buffalo, NY
Salisbury, NC
Wayne, NJ
Paducah, KY
Orlando, FL
Woodland, CA
Grand Forks, ND
Wilmington, NC
Hooksett, NH
Indianola, IA
South Orange, NJ
Forest Grove, OR
Dudley, MA
Lewiston, NY
Miami, FL
Mechanicsburg, PA

Arcata, CA
Hanover, IN
Fort Myers, FL
Springfield, MO
Hudson, NC
Savannah, GA
Durham, NC
Old Westbury, NY
Orlando, FL
Salt Lake City, UT
Mount Vernon, WA
Valparaiso, IN
Villanova, PA
Hayward, CA
Fayette, MO
Rancho Cucamonga, CA
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Manchester, NH
Las Cruces, NM
Stanford, CA
Syracuse, NY
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