

The Kite Runner

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The Setting—Afghanistan

- Terrain – rocky and dry, mountainous in the central part of the country
- Climate – hot summers, cold winters
- Geography – borders Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan



Politics

- In the 19th century, Afghanistan ceded many territories to Great Britain.
- In 1919, the Anglo-Afghan wars returned the ruling power to the Afghani monarchy.
- In 1973, the king's brother staged a coup to create a Republic.
- In 1978, communists overthrew the ruler and took over the government.



Politics (cont.)

- In 1979, the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan to bolster the communist regime.
- The Soviet occupation resulted in a mass exodus from Afghanistan. Over 5 million people left the country and settled mainly in Pakistan.



Politics (cont.)

- However, the world-wide push against communism was considerable, and the Soviet Union finally left the country in 1989 after much opposition from rebel groups inside Afghanistan.
- The chaos that was left by the Soviet withdrawal spawned the rise of the Taliban, and it seized Kabul in 1996.



The Taliban

- Under the Taliban's rule, human rights and civil liberties were slowly peeled away.
- The Taliban instituted cruel and inhumane treatment of those who opposed them in order to solidify their power over Afghanistan's citizens.



How does it relate?

- In the beginning of *The Kite Runner*, the monarchy is still in place and the country is relatively calm. However, chaos starts to erupt as the king is overthrown by his brother.
- In the second half of *The Kite Runner*, the Taliban is in power, creating a much more volatile and dangerous Afghanistan.



Islam

- A religion based on the interpretations of God's word by the prophet Muhammad found in the Qu'ran (sometimes spelled Koran)
- Followers of Islam, Muslims, are devoted to daily prayer (five times a day facing Mecca, the holy city)



The Tenets of Islam

- There are several tenets of Islam, but there are three mentioned early on in the book:
- Zakat – charitable giving
- Hadj – pilgrimage to Mecca
- Namaz – five daily prayers facing Mecca



Divisions of Islam

- Islam is divided into two denominations, Shia and Sunni. Because of the differing views of these two groups, they maintain a rather tense and hostile relationship.
- The Pashtun (majority) are typically Sunni, and the Hazara (minority) are typically Shia.
- Thus, the racial differences are compounded by the religious differences.



Racial Conflict

- The distinct racial division in Afghanistan occurs between the Hazara and the Pashtun. The Pashtun are the majority race, and discrimination against the Hazara is widespread.



Hazara



- The Hazaras are most easily identified by their tendency to have light-colored and almond shaped eyes and round faces.
- They are possibly direct descendants of Genghis Khan, who invaded Afghanistan in the 13th century.
- Thus, they are seen as “invaders” and not true Afghanis.

- The Hazaras typically function as the servant class and partake in few of the freedoms enjoyed by the Pashtun upper-class.



Afghani Words

- *jan* – a term of endearment often used after a person's name: Baba jan
- *agha* – leader, ruler, master, lord
- *sahib* – friend (original), lord
- *naan* – bread
- Other words will be explained in context on a need-to-know basis



Main Characters

- Amir – the main character; narrator
- Baba – Amir's father; wealthy Afghani
- Rahim Khan – Baba's best friend and business partner; an uncle to Amir
- Hassan – Amir's best friend; servant
- Ali – Hassan's father



Essential Questions

- Is it ever appropriate or necessary to remain a silent bystander when someone is being hurt (physically or emotionally)?
- Is it possible to atone (make amends) for our wrongdoings?
- Do we have an obligation to be loyal and truthful to our friends and family members?