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# English IV

## Summer Requirements

### 2025 - 2026

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**Prior to the first day of school, incoming seniors are required to first view the movie *The Kite Runner*, and then read the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.** The viewing of this film will help to provide background and context for the reading of the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Students will submit the assignment associated with *The Kite Runner* the second full week of school, and will complete a comprehensive exam pertaining to the plot of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the third full week of school. Specific dates for each assignment will be provided during the first English class.

### Author Background

In 1965, author Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a large high school in Kabul. In 1976, the Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then Afghanistan had already witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet army. The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the United States. In September of 1980, Hosseini's family moved to San Jose, California. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where, in 1988, he earned a bachelor's degree in Biology. The following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where he earned a Medical Degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Hosseini was a practicing internist between 1996 and 2004.

In March of 2001, while in medical practice, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. In 2003, *The Kite Runner* was published and has since become an international best seller with reproductions in 70 countries. In 2006 he was named a goodwill envoy to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in May of 2007. Because of *The Kite Runner's* success with literary critics and with the public, many doubted that Hosseini's second novel could possibly be as good. However, a majority of reviewers found that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* either lived up to the same standards or surpassed them. Currently, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is published in 60 countries.

Khaled has been working to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan through The Khaled Hosseini Foundation. The concept for The Khaled Hosseini Foundation was inspired by a trip to Afghanistan Hosseini made in 2007 with the UNHCR. He currently lives in northern California.

## Historical Background

### *The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns*

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Afghanistan was portrayed in popular media as a country whose government allowed a terrorist organization to operate within its borders and to commit human rights abuses against its own people. *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are two of the first works of fiction to include the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States within the span of its narratives. **Through detailed events, both plots refocus attention on Afghanistan through a different lens, correcting this narrow view of a country which, despite its problems, has a fascinating history.**

*The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* deal with the country of Afghanistan from the late 1960s to the early 2000s. The nation is located in Central Asia, is made up of thirty-four provinces, and is bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The country's capital is Kabul, which is also the capital of the northeast province of the same name. Afghanistan means "Land of Afghan," Afghan being a name the Pashtun majority used to describe themselves starting before the year 1000. The population of Afghanistan mainly consists of two groups, the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. The Pashtun, Sunni Muslims who are the largest and most politically powerful ethnic group, have long oppressed the Hazaras, Shiite Muslims and Afghanistan's minority group. Like all countries, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history, but it came to international attention after the coup of 1973.

From 1933-1973, Afghanistan was a monarchy ruled by King Zahir Shah. On July 17, 1973, while the king was out of the country, Mohammad Daoud Khan, the king's cousin and a former Prime Minister of Afghanistan, seized power. For six years, Mohammad Daoud Khan was President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan. On April 27, 1978, Daoud was violently overthrown by the PDPA, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan; he was killed in the coup along with most of his family. Although Afghanistan had long insisted on maintaining its independence from Russia, the PDPA was a Communist party and therefore held close ties to (at that time) the Soviet Union.

The PDPA instituted many political and social reforms in Afghanistan, including abolishing religious and traditional customs. These reforms incensed certain groups of Afghans who believed in adherence to traditional and religious laws. These factions began to challenge the government so rigorously that in 1979, the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan, beginning an occupation that would last a decade. Throughout the ten years of Soviet occupation, internal Muslim forces put up a resistance. The United States was among the countries that supported the resistance. When the Soviet Troops finally withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan remained under PDPA for three more years. Then in 1992, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore Soviet support for the government, the *mujahedin* (men fighting for Afghanistan) finally won resulting in the country converting to an Islamic State.

In the years following Soviet withdrawal, there was a great deal of infighting among rival militias, making everyday life for civilians in Afghanistan unsafe. In *The Kite Runner*, character Rahim Khan describes the fear in Kabul during this time. He recalls, "The infighting between the factions was fierce and no one knew if they would live to see the end of the day. Our ears became accustomed to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days ... was as close as you could get to that proverbial hell on earth." Then in 1996, the Taliban took control of Kabul. After so many years of insecurity and violence, the people welcomed the takeover. At first celebrating the arrival of the Taliban, the citizens of Afghanistan had no idea that things

would become worse. The Taliban were a group of Pashtun supremacists who banded together and took almost complete control of the country. Despite their warm initial reception, they soon made life in Afghanistan beyond dangerous. Being Sunni fundamentalists supremacists, they systematically massacred Shiite Muslims and the Hazara people. They also enacted fundamentalist laws, most famously those banning music and dance, and those severely restricting women's rights. *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the methods in which the Taliban used fear and violence to control the people of Afghanistan.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. The end of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* occurs in the early 2000s, when a provisional government was in place. In 2004 the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, was elected. For those citizens living in Afghanistan, life is still dangerous. In addition to violence and human rights abuses still being a common reality in Afghanistan, in 2011 Afghanistan was named one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. Today, there are countless Afghan refugees living in other parts of the world. Within *The Kite Runner* as well as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as one political and military faction supplants another, war is a constant companion to the characters.

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## Viewing/Reading Glossary

**akhund:** a religious leader

**Allah:** Islam's Supreme Being; God

**ambagh:** a woman in a harem; one of a man's multiple wives

**arbab:** a property owner or other town official

**baba:** father

**burqas:** cloaks worn by Muslim women that cover the entire body with a veiled opening for eyes

**coup:** the violent overthrow of a governing body

**flogged :** beaten

**ghazals:** a type of poetry

**harami:** an illegitimate child; one born of two unmarried parents

**Hazara:** Shiite Muslims and minority group of Afghanistan

**henna:** a reddish-brown dye made from a plant

**hijab:** traditional headscarves worn by Muslim women

**hookahs:** water pipes used for smoking tobacco

**infidels:** a person who does not accept the Islamic faith

**jan/jo:** term of affection; dear

**jihad:** a holy war undertaken as a sacred duty by Muslims

**jinn:** a demon or other possessing spirit

**khastegari:** a formal marriage proposal

**kolba:** a hut or rudimentary house

**mashallah:** Islamic for "whatever God wills"

**mosque:** holy building of worship for Muslims

**mujahideen:** Islamic warriors

**mullah:** a person who teaches and expounds Islamic sacred law

**nikka:** a wedding

**Pashtun:** Sunni Muslims who are the largest and most politically powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan

**Koran:** Islam's holy book containing sacred law

**shaheed:** a person who died for a cause

**shari'a:** the code of law based on the Koran

**sharab:** alcohol

**sufis:** Muslim mystics

**tandoor:** a clay oven for cooking food

**turban:** a traditional headdress for male Muslims made of fabric wound around a cap

# The Kite Runner

## Synopsis

Taking us from Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy to the present, *The Kite Runner* is the unforgettable, beautifully told story of the friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Although raised in the same household, the central characters, Amir and Hassan, nonetheless grow up in different worlds. Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy Pashtun man. Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a member of Afghanistan's shunned ethnic minority, the Hazaras. Their intertwined lives and fates reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade and Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, although Amir thinks that he has escaped his past, he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him.

*The Kite Runner* is a story about friendship, betrayal, and the price of loyalty. It is about the bonds between fathers and sons, and the power of lies. Containing a history that has not been told in fiction before, *The Kite Runner* describes the rich culture and beauty of a land in the process of being destroyed. However, despite the devastation, through the novel's faith in the power of storytelling as well as the possibilities for redemption, Khaled Hosseini also gives us hope.

## Assignment “Creating Analytical Questions”

Directions: While viewing *The Kite Runner*, become truly invested in the film and create five questions that can be used to discuss and analyze various aspects of the plot. Please use the following guide for assistance in creating these questions. Your questions must be typed and ready for collection the second, full week of the 2025-2026 academic year.

Some things to think about before creating questions:

1. Good analytical questions are simply and clearly stated. They do not need to be repeated or reworded to be understood.
2. Good analytical questions are not answered by "yes" or "no" but rather lead to critical thinking (comparison, synthesis, analysis, evaluation) about the work and the issues it raises.
3. Good analytical questions call for more than simply recalling facts or guessing what the others already know, but rather are open-ended, leading to a variety of responses.
4. Good analytical questions often cite particular scenes or passages and ask individuals to draw connections between these specific scenes and the rest of the plot.
5. Good analytical questions clarify scenes or issues viewers may find difficult. They help viewers understand cultural differences that influence their interpretation. They invite personal responses and connections.
6. Good analytical questions create and challenge connections between the setting's social issues and the work's themes.

# A Thousand Splendid Suns

## Synopsis

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a breathtaking story set against the volatile events of an Afghanistan era of thirty years. From the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to the post-Taliban rebuilding, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* captures the violence, fear, hope, and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. Inextricable from the history playing out around them, it is a tale of two generations of characters brought jarringly together by the tragic sweep of war and depicts the personal lives of two women's struggle to survive, raise a family, and find happiness.

Propelled by the same storytelling instinct that made *The Kite Runner* a beloved classic, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is at once a remarkable chronicle of three decades of Afghan history and a deeply moving account of family and friendship. It is a striking, heart-wrenching novel of an unforgiving time, an unlikely friendship, and an indestructible love—a stunning accomplishment.

## Reading/Study Guide

### Setting:

Spanning between the 1960s to the early 2000s, the beginning of the story takes place in Herat, Afghanistan, and Gul Daman, a small village outside of Herat. The town of Herat is known for its artists, especially its poets. The setting changes to Kabul, the largest city of Afghanistan and its capital. There is also some time in Murree, Pakistan.

### Style and Structure:

While Part I of the novel provides the background of one of the central characters, Mariam, Part II of the novel provides the background of the other central character, Laila. Within Part III of the novel, as the main characters' lives become entwined, the chapters alternate between the narration of Miriam and Laila. Part IV is narrated solely by Laila.

### Character Identification:

Mariam

Nana

Jalil Khan

Mullah Faizullah

Rasheed

Laila

Fariba (Mammy)

Hakim (Babi)

Tariq

Abdul Sharif

Aziza

Zalmai

## Study Guide Questions:

1. The first two parts of the novel provide Mariam's and Laila's background. Summarize Mariam's childhood and upbringing as well as Laila's childhood and upbringing.
2. Mariam's mother tells her: "Women like us. We endure. It's all we have." Discuss how this sentiment shapes Mariam's life. Throughout the course of the novel how does Mariam endure?
3. Laila's father tells her, "You're a very, very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything that you want." Discuss Laila's relationship with her father. What aspects of his character does she inherit? In what ways is she different?
4. Throughout the course of the novel, explain how Mariam's and Laila's relationship evolves and why.
5. Explain Laila's and Tariq's relationship. Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.
6. Upon the Taliban takeover, the group implements a theocratic government based upon sacred laws from a puritanical form of Islam, which all citizens must obey. Specifically, what are these laws and how are they enforced?
7. Compare and contrast the men in the novel: Rasheed, Jalil, Tariq, and Babi. Focus on their personalities as well as their interpretation of Islam and hope for society. How does this affect their relationships with women in the novel?
8. From Mariam's action within her final altercation with Rasheed to refusing to see visitors while she is imprisoned and calling no witnesses at her trial, consider and explain her decisions.
9. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, explain how Mariam and Laila are both victims of circumstances as well as masters of their destinies.
10. Currently, Afghanistan is deemed one of the most dangerous countries in the world for females. Using specific examples from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, support this declaration.