**The Kite Runner**

***Khaled Hosseini***

**Chapter Summaries** **2**

**Key Quotes 5**

**Language 6**

**Structure 7**

**Form 7**

**Characters 8**

**Themes 10**

**Motifs 11**

**Symbolism 12**

*“In this, apparently the first Afghan novel to be written in English, two motherless boys who learn to crawl and walk side by side, are destined to destroy each other across the gulf of their tribal difference. It's a Shakespearean beginning to an epic tale that spans lives lived across two continents amid political upheavals, where dreams wilt before they bud and where a search for a child finally makes a coward into a man. The Kite Runner is the shattering first novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan doctor who received political asylum in 1980 as civil conflict devastated his homeland. Whatever the truth of the claim to be the first English-language Afghan novel, Hosseini is certainly the first Afghan novelist to fictionalise his culture for a Western readership, melding the personal struggle of ordinary people into the terrible historical sweep of a devastated country in a rich and soul-searching narrative.”*

**The Guardian**

**Chapter Summaries**

**One** – A nameless narrator reflects on the 1975 winter that *“made [him] what [he] is today”*, mentions Hassan when he sees a kite in the San Francisco sky and introduces the theme of unatoned sins.

**Two** – Amir introduces Hassan, describing him as beautiful apart from his harelip, and explains that he is an incredibly loyal Hazara servant. Baba and Ali, Amir and Hassan’s respective fathers, are also introduces. It is revealed that Amir’s mother died during childbirth.

**Three** – Baba is presented as formidable, and tells Amir that stealing is the only sin regardless of what the religious *“monkeys”* tell him. Amir later overhears him having a conversation with Rahim Khan, where Baba says he doesn’t understand why Amir is unable to stand up for himself. Rahim Khan defends Amir, saying the only thing he lacks is a mean streak.

**Four** – Baba’s past is explored, which leads to Amir commenting that he has never called Hassan his friend, just like Baba never calls Ali his friend. Amir writes his first short story, which Baba remains indifferent to. Rahim Khan asks to reader the story and praises Amir’s writing, meaning Amir wishes that he was his father instead. Hassan reveals a problem with the plot, angering Amir.

**Five** – Explosion and gunfire is present in the chapter, indicating the start of the unrest in Afghanistan. Assef is relentlessly cruel to Hassan because he is a Hazara, and comments that Hitler was a great leader. Hassan protects both him and Amir by pulling out a slingshot; Assef backs down but threatens to get his revenge. For his birthday, Baba pays for Hassan’s cleft lip to be repaired.

**Six** – The idea of kite battles are introduced as winter draws in. Amir loves kites because he believes it is the only thing that allows him to connect with Baba. Amir and Hassan aren’t good at building their own kites, but are good at fighting them. Hassan is described as the greatest kite runner.

**Seven** – Amir and Hassan win the annual kite fighting tournament as Baba watches. Amir decides to give the blue kite to Baba as a trophy, and so goes to find Hassan who was running it. Amir finds that Hassan has been cornered in an alleyway by Assef, Wali and Kamal, but decides not to step in in case the blue kite is damaged as a result. Hassan is raped by Assef as Amir watches. Amir returns home to give Baba the kite, although is left wondering if Hassan knows of his betrayal.

**Eight** – Amir avoids Hassan, even when Hassan goes out of his way to be friendly to him. Amir then asks Baba whether he’s considered getting new servants, and their relationship (which had been good since the kite tournament) deteriorates again. Amir is left unable to sleep as a result of his guilt, and tries to start a pomegranate fight with Hassan in order to feel like he’s being punished for his actions. Hassan refuses, instead smashing the fruit against his own forehead.

**Nine** – Amir decides that he cannot live with Hassan anymore, and so frames him as a thief. Hassan lies to cover for Amir, meaning that Amir becomes aware that Hassan and Ali know that he stood by and let Assef rape Hassan. Baba forgives him, although Ali insists that it would be *“impossible”* for them to stay. Baba cries for the first time, and drives Ali and Hassan to the bus station.

**Ten** – Baba and Amir flee Kabul and head to Pakistan in secret. Along the way, Baba risks his life to stop a young mother being raped by a Russian solider much to the anger and terror of Amir. They are left in a basement waiting for the truck to be repaired, where they meet Kamal and his father. It is revealed that, like Hassan, Kamal was raped. They take a fuel truck across the border into Pakistan. Kamal dies from the fumes, and his father commits suicide as a result.

**Eleven** – Baba and Amir settle in California. Baba dislikes his job, but says that he would much rather work than live off charity. Amir graduates high school and decides to go to college to major in English, much to the disapproval of Baba. Despite this set back, the relationship between Baba and Amir is shown to have improved greatly, working together to make a bit of extra money at the flea market. It is here that Amir meets Soraya.

**Twelve** – Amir begins to court Soraya, although this comes to an abrupt end when her father, General Taheri, finds them talking alone. Baba is diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour and refuses palliative treatment. He refuses to let Amir tell anyone, but the secret is revealed when he collapses at the market. Amir asks Baba to arrange for him to marry Soraya. She reveals that she ran away with a boyfriend when she was eighteen, and so is no longer a virgin. Despite this making her unsuitable for marriage in Afghan culture, Amir says he wants to marry her anyway.

**Thirteen** – Amir and Soraya marry, and she moves in with them to help care for Baba. He dies a month later in his sleep. Amir finds the funeral hard, realising how alone he feels without Baba being around. He settles into a routine with Soraya, and his first book is published. After trying unsuccessfully to conceive for a year, the doctors tell the couple that they will never be able to have children. They decide not to adopt.

**Fourteen** – Rahim Khan calls Amir, asking him to come to Pakistan to see him. He tells Amir that *“there is a way to be good again”*. Amir decides to leave his comfortable life in America to visit Rahim Khan, telling Soraya that he won’t be gone more than a couple of weeks.

**Fifteen** – Amir reaches Pakistan and finds Rahim Khan to be gravely ill. He explains the political history of Afghanistan since Amir fled to America, revealing that although many people believed the fighting would stop when the Taliban defeated the Russian although this was not the case. He tells Amir that he wants to talk to him about Hassan.

**Sixteen** – Rahim Khan reveals that by the time he tracked Hassan down, he was married and his wife was expected their first child. Ali had been killed in a landmine, unable to escape because of his crippled leg. Hassan asked about Baba and Amir a lot, and wept when he was told that Baba had passed away. Hassan agrees to come back to Baba’s house, but refuses to sleep in the house in case he offends Amir. Hassan’s daughter was still born and his absent mother returns, having been viciously attacked. They take her in, and she becomes a good grandmother to Sohrab, Hassan’s newborn son. Rahim Khan reveals that like his father, Sohrab is a good kite runner.

**Seventeen** – Amir asks where Hassan can be found, and is handed a photo and letter. Rahim Khan then tells Amir that Hassan is dead, having been shot in the head by the Taliban for refusing to leave Amir’s property. Rahim Khan then tells Amir that he called him here to go and rescue Sohrab, revealing that he knows that Amir stood by as Assef raped Hassan. He also reveals that Ali was sterile, and that Hassan was actually Baba’s son.

**Eighteen** – Amir feels incredibly angry that he was denied the truth and was robbed of a brother. He reflects on the irony that the one trait he did have in common with Baba was the betrayal of their closest friends, and blames himself for Hassan’s death by thinking about the life he could have had in America. Amir decides to go to Kabul and track Sohrab down.

**Nineteen** – Farid helps Amir enter Afghanistan, but is hostile towards him because he was born into a privileged family and has therefore also been a *“tourist”*. They spend the night at Wahid’s house, where Amir reveals why he is actually there. The poverty shown is overwhelming, with Amir realising the children haven’t eaten only when they are uninterested in the wristwatch he gives them. As they leave, Amir puts a bundle of money under a mattress to help them, much like he did when framing Hassan earlier in the novel.

**Twenty** – They enter Kabul, and Amir is shocked by the decay. They locate the orphanage Sohrab had been sent to, only to discover that he had been sold to the Taliban. Farid tries to strangle the orphanage owner, but Amir stops him. They are told to go to Ghazi stadium and look for the Taliban official with dark glasses because he would know where Sohrab was.

**Twenty-One** – They visit Amir’s childhood home, discovering that the neighbourhood is now home to rich Taliban officials. Farid then takes Amir to the football stadium, where at half time a man and woman accused of adultery are stoned to death. Farid comments that the Taliban are taking Allah’s name in vain, and should be ashamed to call themselves Muslims. A meeting is arranged for later that afternoon.

**Twenty-Two** – Amir goes alone to see the Taliban official, where Sohrab is brought out wearing a dress and makeup, and made to dance whenever music is called. Amir realises that the man is actually Assef. Amir demands that he releases the boy, offering him money in return. Assef declines, saying they will fight to the death – if Amir wins, he can take the boy home with him. A brutal attack begins, leaving Amir badly hurt. Sohrab steps in, using a slingshot to remove Assef’s left eye (fulfilling his father’s threat from earlier in the novel). They escape, reaching Farid’s car before Amir falls into unconsciousness.

**Twenty-Three** – Amir fades in and out of consciousness, before finally waking up two days later in hospital with serious, but no longer life threatening, injuries. Rahim Khan leaves, presumably to die in peace, leaving Amir his money and a letter telling him to forgive himself and Baba. Amir and Sohrab begin to bond over cards. Amir discovers that the people who were going to look after Sohrab are fictitious, and knowing the Taliban want to find him, he leaves the hospital early to go to Islamabad.

**Twenty-Four** – Sohrab goes missing, and Amir finds him outside a mosque. He tells Amir that he feels guilty for forgetting what his parents look like, so Amir hands him the photo Rahim Khan gave him, and that he feels dirty because Assef abused him. Amir asks Sohrab to move to America with him and then calls Soraya to ask for help with adopting him. Amir discovers that adopting Sohrab would be very difficult, and that he would have to stay in an orphanage for a short time if there was to be any hope. Amir tells Sohrab this, apparently going back on his promise to protect him. Sohrab is terrified, and attempts suicide. Amir finds him unconscious in the bath having slit his wrists.

**Twenty-Five** – Sohrab survives, but tells Amir that he wished he hadn’t. The boy doesn’t speak again, even after being successfully taken to America. Soraya is crushed by the boy’s behaviour, having expected him to be the child she could never have. At a party, Amir buys Sohrab a kite. The two of them fly it together, winning the battle. Amir runs the kite for Sohrab, just as Hassan once did for him, and Sohrab smiles for the first time.

**Key Quotes**

***“I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years”*** – This sentence appears in the opening chapter of the novel, encouraging the reader to question what Amir is referring to. The time reference shows the significance of the event, and the imagery used implies that it isn’t important for a positive reason. The reader later becomes aware that Amir is referring to Hassan being raped by Assef, an event which leads to Amir being haunted by guilt continuously.

***“A boy who won’t stand up for himself becomes a man who can’t stand up to anything”*** – Baba says this to Rahim Khan as a comment on the behaviour of Amir. Through this he identifies Amir’s greatest flaw: cowardice. It is this trait that leaves him desperately craving Baba’s love, and ultimately leads to be letting Assef rape Hassan. It also foreshadows Amir’s return to Kabul in search of Sohrab; the test of Amir’s character also tests whether Baba’s statement is true.

***“Huddled together in the dining room and waiting for the sun to rise, none of us had any notion that a way of life had ended”*** – This sentence appears towards the start of chapter five and indicates the fall of the monarchy and the descent of Kabul (and indeed Afghanistan) into political instability. The peaceful world Amir knows, made possible by Baba’s wealth, turns into one full of violence and uncertainty. It ultimately leads to Baba and Amir fleeing the country.

***“There is a way to be good again”*** – Rahim Khan says this to Amir over the phone when trying to encourage him to come to Pakistan and in the dialogue this appears like an afterthought. It reveals that Rahim Khan knows the truth about what Amir did to Hassan. It also ties into the theme of redemption, allowing the reader to believe that by returning to the Middle East, Amir will be given the opportunity to break the cycle of guilt he is trapped in.

***"I had been the entitled half, the society-approved, legitimate half, the unwitting embodiment of Baba's guilt. I looked at Hassan, showing those two missing front teeth, sunlight slanting on his face. Baba's other half. The unentitled, under-privileged half. The half who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba. The half that, maybe, in the most secret recesses of his heart, Baba had thought of as his true son”*** – Amir makes this comment when he discovers that Hassan was actually his half-brother. It arguably shows some jealously, but also sounds very reflective. Amir has accepted that Hassan was the better person, but is now prepared to search for redemption through saving Hassan’s son. It is almost ironic that Amir only considers Hassan as a brother now he knows they are biologically related, as Hassan always treated him with the loyalty demanded by family.

***“My body was broken—just how badly I wouldn’t find out until later—but I felt healed... healed at last”*** – Amir makes this comment during his fight with Assef, showing that he has finally found relief from the guilt that has been haunting him for years. Hassan refused to throw pomegranates at him, meaning that this was the first time Amir feels like he’s being punished for his actions. Although Amir is physically hurt during the fight, he is psychologically healed by it.

***“For you, a thousand times over”*** – Hassan speaks this line as goes to run the blue kite that Amir cut down to win the tournament, showing his devotion to his friend. This line is mentioned by Amir throughout the novel when he reflects on the loyalty of Hassan compared to his own cowardice. Amir says this to Sohrab in the final chapter, showing that the cycle of redemption is complete.

**Language** *(the use of particular words or styles to convey the narrative)*

**Afghan words** – used to remind the reader of the nationality of the characters

**Bold and italics** – used to emphasis important words, as well as often being used when Amir is quoting what another character said earlier

**Clinical words** – used in the scenes in the various hospitals in the novel, showing the seriousness of the situation by punctuating Amir’s familiar writing style

**Cultural and religious references** – used to set the context of the novel and explain the Afghan class system for Western readers

**Descriptions** – used to paint vivid pictures, often of scenes the adult Amir strongly remembers

**Emotive language** – used to encourage, or discourage, the reader to feel a connection with the various characters in the novel

**Foreboding** – used to prepare the reader for upcoming events, setting a dark tone to many parts of the novel

**Implications** – used when Amir finds in too painful to state something explicitly

**Pathetic fallacy** – used to contribute to the meaning of a event by mirroring the emotions Amir feels with the weather, most noticeably in chapter nine when Ali and Hassan leave Kabul

**Punctuation** – used to show moments Amir struggles to put into words by contrasting faltering language with his usually well-written style

**Reflective and introspective language** – used when Amir is looking back at past events or when he is criticising his own actions

**Repetition** – used throughout the novel, typically to link the events with Amir’s childhood

**Time references** – used to give the reader a sense of where in Amir’s life the events are happening, important given the story spans several decades

**Violent imagery** – used to show the horror the characters faced in unstable Afghanistan as well as the evilness of some of the characters themselves

**Structure** *(the order of content, from the overall narrative to individual sentences)*

**Bildungsroman** – The novel has elements of bildungsroman as much of the story follows the growth and development of Amir from a selfish boy to a selfless man.

**Flashbacks** – Throughout the novel Amir refers back to his childhood, hence reminding the reader that those events have shaped his entire life. They are also used to fill in background information for the Western reader, who may struggle to understand the plot without this.

**Foreshadowing** – From the very first chapter, foreshadowing is used to prepare the reader for the events that follow. This technique is used frequently before chapter seven to warn the reader of Hassan’s rape.

**Journeys** – The novel takes place in three countries: Afghanistan, America and Pakistan. Journeys are therefore a recurring technique used to connect the story’s events.

**Linear Chronology** – Although flashbacks are common, much of the story is told in linear chronology following Amir from child to man.

**Retrospective** – Amir narrates every chapter apart from sixteen retrospectively, from the point of view of his adult self. While he appears brutally honest about his childish thoughts, and only reveals facts as he learnt them, it forces the reader to question the bias in the novel.

**Subtitles** – Chapters are subtitled with their location and date when this varies from the chapter before. Given the novel spans several decades and two continents, this ensures the reader is aware of where the action is taking place.

**Form** *(the different shapes the narrative takes)*

**Dialogue** – used to give the reader different perspectives, given that the novel is narrated by Amir

**Dreams** – used to reveal Amir’s hidden thoughts and desires, as well as breaking up the horrific scene of Hassan’s rape in chapter seven

**Flashbacks** – used to remind the reader of past events while also showing that Amir is haunted by guilt from his childhood actions

**Letters** – used to give other characters a voice in the novel, while allowing those absent from certain chapters to be reintroduced (for example, Hassan’s thoughts are given through his letter even though he has already died by the time Amir receives it)

**Stories** – The story of “Rotsam and Sohrab” is used to show the world that Hassan dreams of (free from race and full of loving relationships) and highlight the themes of betrayal and secrecy

**Stream of Consciousness** – used in chapter twenty-three as Amir fades in and out of consciousness following his fight with Assef to show his disjointed thoughts

**Characters**

**Ali** – Ali acts as Hassan’s father, and although rarely shows emotion outwardly, obviously loves him more than anything else in the world. He was adopted by Baba’s father when his parents were killed, and so grew up with Baba. He suffered from Polio as a child, leaving him partial paralyzed in the face and suffering from a limp. Ali died in a landmine explosion.

**Amir** - The narrator and the protagonist of the story, Amir is Baba’s sensitive son. Amir had a wealthy childhood, but lacked an emotional connection with his father, ultimately leading him to betray Hassan. Hassan is Amir’s best friend, although he goes between acting loyally and attacking him out of jealously. The guilt caused by his treatment of Hassan leads him to risk everything to try and save Sohrab, Hassan’s son. Amir starts to forgive himself by adopting Sohrab, taking him back to America where he is married and has a successful career as a published author.

**Assef** - The novel’s antagonist, Assef represents all things wrong in Afghanistan. He is a rapist, abusing both Hassan and Sohrab, and a racist who wishes to rid Afghanistan of Hazaras. Assef cites Hitler as his role model, and is incapable of remorse. Sohrab destroys his left eye to save Amir, but it remains unclear if he dies as a result.

**Baba** – Baba is a wealthy, respected businessman who believes that bravery and thinking for oneself are hugely important. He tries to pass these qualities onto Amir, his legitimate son, and is presented as frustrated by Amir’s childish cowardice. He is Hassan’s father too, a fact kept hidden from both boys during childhood. Because he cannot openly love Hassan as a son, he is often distant from Amir. However, he clearly loves Amir and admits that he only moved to America to give him a better life. He dies of cancer shortly after Amir married Soraya.

**Farid** – Initially unfriendly towards Amir, the taxi-driver learns of the reason Amir has returned to Afghanistan becomes a loyal and valuable friend to him. He has missing fingers and toes from a landmine explosion that killed his two youngest daughters.

**Farzana** - Hassan’s wife and Sohrab’s mother, Farzana is only mentioned briefly. Amir never meets her, but the descriptions from Rahim Khan present her as loving and polite. She dies alongside Hassan during a Taliban raid.

**General Taheri** - Proud to the point of arrogance, he is in many ways the stereotypical Afghan male determined to uphold traditions. He has a strained relationship with his daughter Soraya, but appears to accept Amir into the family.

**Hassan** – Hassan proves himself a loyal friend to Amir repeatedly, defending Amir when he is attacked and always being ready to listen. He is brave and selfless, and presented as intelligent even though he is uneducated. Despite not being present in much of the novel, he plays a major role, being referred to repeatedly and acting as the catalyst to Amir’s search for redemption. He is shot by the Taliban for refusing to abandon Amir’s property, leaving behind one son, Sohrab.

**Jamila** - General Taheri’s wife and Soraya’s mother, Jamila plays the part of the typical Afghan wife and mother. She loves Amir straight away, and is delighted when Soraya marries.

**Kamal** – A coward, Kamal helps Assef rape Hassan. He is raped himself, which renders him silent. While trying to flee Afghanistan Kamal dies, presumably from inhaled fumes.

**Omar Faisal** – Omar is the lawyer who encourages Amir to place Sohrab into an orphanage in order to adopt him.

**Rahim Khan** - Rahim Khan is Baba’s closest confidant, and often serves as a father figure to Amir. He phones Amir to get him to return to the Middle East, asking him to rescue Sohrab. It is revealed that he knew about Amir’s betrayal, but encourages him to forgive himself. Rahim Khan presumably dies, having told Amir the truth about Hassan’s heritage.

**Raymond Andrews** - The American Embassy official who tells Amir to give up on Sohrab, Amir thinks he is cruel. It is then revealed that his daughter died, having committed suicide.

**Sanaubar** - Sanaubar is infamously immoral in her youth and abandons Hassan just after he is born, although she proves herself a caring grandmother to Sohrab when she reappears. She dies in her sleep when Sohrab was four.

**Sharif** - Soraya’s uncle, he becomes instrumental in helping to get Sohrab into the United States.

**Sofia** - Amir’s mother, she loved literature as he does. She died in childbirth, meaning Amir often blames himself for her death, believing that Baba hates him because of it.

**Sohrab** – Sohrab is the son of Hassan and Farzana. In many ways he acts as a substitute for Hassan in the novel, allowing Amir to redeem himself for the betrayal of Hassan. He was abused by Assef, turning him from a normal, happy child into a silent and terrified boy. He attempts suicide when Amir says that he may have to return to an orphanage, and doesn’t smile again until the final chapter.

**Soraya** - Amir’s wife, she is steady, intelligent and always there for Amir when he needs her. She can be strong-willed like her father and openly disapproves of the way Afghan culture treats women.

**Wahid** – Wahid is Farid's brother. He is kind to Amir and does not judge him for moving to America in is teenage years. He is very poor, so Amir hides money under a mattress to help them.

**Wali** – Depicted as a conformist rather than evil like Assef, he is one of the boys from the neighborhood present when Hassan is raped.

**Themes** *(abstract ideas that emerges from the text, either explicitly announced or implied)*

**Sin and Redemption** – The novel has many bildungsroman features, and is a story of Amir’s journey from sin (allowing Hassan to be raped) through to redemption (saving Sohrab). Whilst it is ironic that the cause of the main sin in the novel is Amir’s desire to redeem himself in his father’s eye, the ending of the story is optimistic and leaves the reader with the sense that the cycle of sin and redemption has been broken. Baba believes that *“a boy who won’t stand up for himself becomes a man who can’t stand up to anything”*, although Amir eventually disproves this.

**Violence** – Although Hosseini stated that he wanted *“The Kite Runner”* to tell of the peaceful nature of Afghans, in is impossible to avoid the theme of violence in the novel. Almost every character in the novel suffers from violence, or inflicts it on another, throughout. The kite flying that features so heavily in Amir and Hassan’s childhood is presented as a battle – violent in itself and cuts the hands of the boys too. This suggests that in Afghanistan, pleasure and plain are inseparable.

**Family** – The theme of family and heritage is important in the novel as it plays an important part in Afghan culture. This idea is strong throughout the chapters surrounding Amir and Soraya’s courtship, as for the first time Amir and Baba are forced to abide by traditions. The importance of lineage is shown through the newlyweds’ decision not to adopt and Amir’s realisation that he was *“no longer Baba’s son”* following the funeral. Amir doesn’t realise how important family is, until he realises that Baba’s secret has robbed him of a brother.

**Friendship** – *“The Kite Runner”* is ultimately the story of Hassan and Amir’s friendship. Hassan is more obviously presented as a good friend, being unwaveringly loyal. Amir, clearly a troubled young boy, is not presented as a good friend to Hassan, betraying him in the worst ways imaginable. However, the circular structure of the novel suggests that their friendship isn’t ended through separation or even death, with Amir risking his life to save Hassan’s son.

**Discrimination** – The plot of *“The Kite Runner”* is centred on the long running discrimination of the Hazara minority. Although Baba is a role model for treating Hazaras with respect, taking Ali in and calling him *“family”*, the difference between the two ethnic groups remains clear. Ali and Hassan live in the hut outside, and such as Hassan’s sense of loyalty that he sacrifices himself to protect Amir’s property even when he has a young family to support. When the Taliban take over, discrimination is everywhere. For example, no one is allowed to listen to music accept the Taliban officials. Hosseini makes it clear that racial tension in Afghanistan is not new, but greatly intensified by the Taliban.

**Politics** – The novel’s events, while framed by Amir’s life, follow the political history of Afghanistan from the peacefulness of the monarchy through the founding of the republic to the Soviet invasion and inward fighting that destroys Afghanistan. This history shapes the lives of the characters, perhaps implying that the redemption of Amir suggests hope for Afghanistan’s future.

**Motifs** *(a recurring image or element that has symbolic significance in the narrative)*

**Rape** – In the novel, the motif of rape is about more than violence and can be seen as the total physical and mental domination of the victim. The victims suffer lasting emotional trauma as a result of the attack on their mental wellbeing, and the repercussions of this affects many of the other characters in the novel. There are four significant instances of rape in the novel, each with carrying with it slightly different messages:

* **Assef rapes Hassan** (this event is the pivotal moment of the novel which sets into action Amir’s search for redemption. It changes the friendship of Hassan and Amir, although it is later revealed that Hassan remained loyal until the death, and reveals the true evil of Assef, setting him up to be the novels antagonist)
* **Baba prevents a soldier raping a woman** (Baba is shown to risk his life to protect an unknown woman, the first time in the novel that Amir *sees* his father’s bravery rather than just hear about it. Baba declared he’d *“take a thousand of [his] bullets before [he] let this indecency take place”*, heavily contrasting with Amir who was worrying about having *“no one left in this world”* at the same time.
* **Kamal is raped** (during the journey to Pakistan, Baba and Amir meet Kamal and his father. It is implied that Kamal, one of the boys present when Assef raped Hassan, has been rendered silent and *“doesn’t talk... just stares”* since suffering the same fate. This highlights the circular structure of the novel’s events and suggests that no one is safe in Afghanistan)
* **Assef rapes Sohrab** (when Amir returns to Afghanistan and tracks down Sohrab, it becomes apparent that Assef has been abusing Hassan’s young son. This too shows the cyclical structure of the novel, as well as providing Amir the opportunity to put an end to the feelings of guilt he’s been plagued with since Hassan’s rape. This too is a pivotal moment of the novel, with Amir having found some way *“to be good again”* and starting to build a relationship with his nephew)

**Irony** – The novel is narrated retrospectively, and it is apparent that the adult Amir is aware of the irony in his own story. The greatest irony, and tragedy, in the novel is that Amir chooses to allow Hassan to be raped by Assef because he was desperate for his father’s approval. In reality his actions were cowardly, making him the one thing Baba was desperate for him not to be. Amir believed that his decision would make him happy, but instead it overwhelmed him with guilt. It is also ironic that the trait Baba and Amir share is the betrayal of their best friends, not any of the good features Amir tried so hard to replicate. Rahim Khan, often of the voice of reason in the novel, pointed out that even as a child Amir had grasped the concept of irony.

Other motifs in *“The Kite Runner”* include:

* **Scars** (almost every character is the novel is scarred, either psychological or physically - for example Ali is physically crippled by polio and mentally harmed knowing that his son is not biologically his)
* **The past** (despite being written retrospectively, the novel does not have a linear structure. Amir switches between time periods, both allowing the reader an insight into the character’s backgrounds and highlighting the idea that the past defines the present)
* **Culture** (*“The Kite Runner”* was the first mainstream novel written in English by an Afghan author, meaning the differences between the cultures presented are very important)
* **Dreams** (Amir’s dreams are used to show his otherwise hidden desires, while also highlighting the fact that Amir can only imagine the horrors that Hassan faced)

**Symbolism**(*using evocative images of concrete objects or actions to convey further ideas)*

**The Cleft Lip** – Hassan’s cleft lip is his most recognisable feature, and acts as a mark of his status in society. As well as being indicative of poverty, it is used to show Baba’s love for Hassan (as he pays for a surgeon to fix the deformity). Arguably, is also shows the differences between reality and appearance in the novel, as Hassan is pure in personality but flawed on the outside. Assef splits Amir’s lip *“in two, clean down the middle”* leaving him scarred in the same way Hassan was. This can be seen as symbolic of the merging of Amir and Hassan – Amir takes on Hassan’s strength and goodness, while also becoming a father figure for Sohrab.

**Kites** – Kites are used to symbolise a range of things throughout the novel, including Amir’s happiness and his guilt, as well as providing a link between many of the characters. Amir enjoyed kite flying as a child as he felt it was is only solid link to his father and so believed that winning the tournament was the only way to make Baba proud of him. The kite takes on a new meaning in chapter 7 though, when Amir allows Hassan to be raped in order to protect the kite. From that point, the kite is a symbol of his guilt for betraying Hassan. Amir doesn’t fly a kite again until the very end of the novel, when he uses it to form the start of a relationship with Sohrab. Importantly, he runs the kite for Sohrab, like Hassan used to do for him. This cyclical structure reminds the reader that the novel is predominantly about the friendship between Amir and Hassan, while emphasising the idea that Amir has finally found redemption. Kites can also be seen as a reminder that Amir was a child during the winter Hassan *“stopped smiling”* and as a symbol of freedom.

**The Lamb** – The lamb is used in Islamic religion to signify the sacrifice of an innocent being. It is therefore fitting that Amir describes both Hassan and Amir as looking like lambs preparing for the slaughter. A flashback of the Islamic celebration of Eid Al-Adha is used as Assef rapes Hassan, and Amir later questions whether Hassan was simply *“the lamb [he] had to slay”* to win Baba’s approval. Like the sheep, mascara is applied to Sohrab before his humiliation. While both are figurative sacrificed, the meanings are different – Hassan’s rape starts Amir’s quest for redemption, while Sohrab’s exploitation concludes it.

Other symbols in *“The Kite Runner”* include:

* **The pomegranate tree** (friendship – Hassan and Amir carve their names into it, and Amir uses pomegranates to unsuccessfully encourage Hassan to punish him)
* **Television** (western culture and promises – Amir promises to buy Hassan one, but actually uses one to help Sohrab feel more comfortable at the hotel)
* **Assef’s brass knuckles** (fear – they are present each time Assef threatens to hurt Amir and/or Hassan)
* **The slingshot** (devotion – both Sohrab and Hassan use it to protect Amir)