



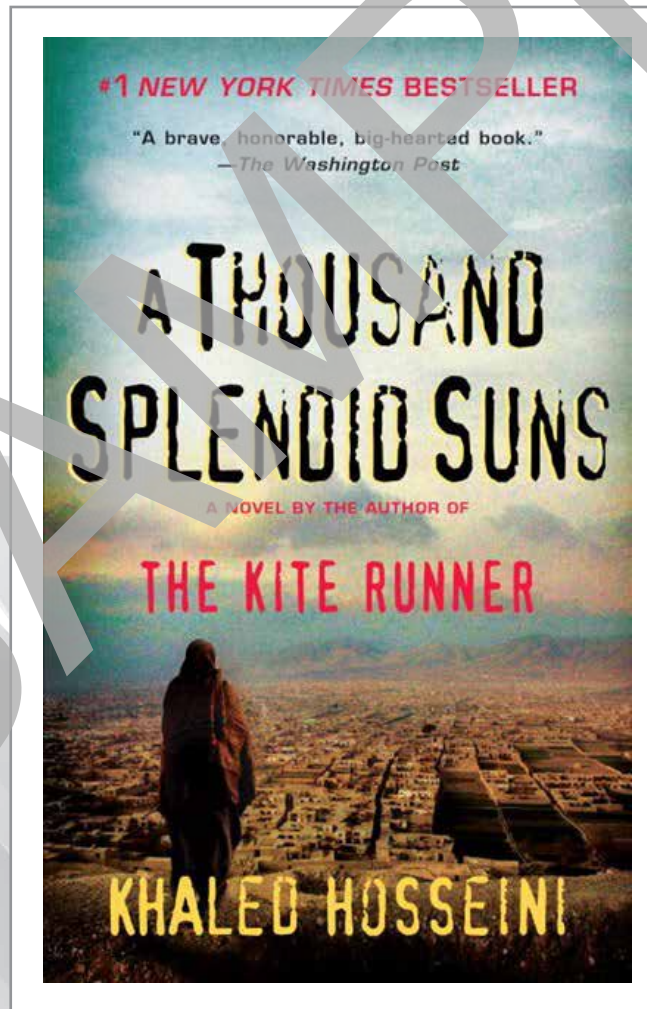
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, compare/contrast, brainstorming, inferences

Comprehension

Cause/effect, summarizing, predictions, conflict/resolution, decision-making

Literary Elements

Theme, metaphor, irony, foreshadowing, characterization, setting, tone, text format, point of view

Writing

Journal, poetry, essay, personal letter

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions, application, oxymorons, analogies

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, report, performance

Across the Curriculum

Poetry—Saib-e-Tabrizi, Hafez; Culture—Muslim weddings, espad seed-burning ritual, Afghan music, food, movies, and art; Literature—*The Old Man and the Sea*; Art—collage, pencil sketch; History—Afghanistan's past governments; Current Events—current political state of Afghanistan

Genre: fiction

Setting: Afghanistan and Pakistan, 1964–2003

Themes: identity, gender roles, family relationships, endurance, friendship, forgiveness, motherhood, loyalty, female solidarity, shattered dreams, war

Conflicts: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. society

Tone: objective, candid, serious, realistic

Mood: ranges from dark and terrifying to accepting and hopeful

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Date of First Publication: 2007

Summary

Mariam and Laila, two women who live in Afghanistan, form an unlikely alliance which ultimately turns to friendship, love, and finally, heartbreaking sacrifice. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a woman who served a wealthy family. After her mother's suicide, her father, embarrassed by her presence and bullied by his wives, forces his 15-year-old daughter to marry the brutal Rasheed. Laila is the daughter of modern-thinking parents who have great aspirations for her. A wartime tragedy, however, dashes Laila's dreams, and she is forced to become Rasheed's second wife. Together, Mariam and Laila endure war, painful separations from loved ones, and a common enemy apart from the war—their husband Rasheed. Although their lives are filled with sacrifice, ultimately Mariam must make a final and awful choice, which dooms her but saves Laila.

About the Author

Personal: Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965, the oldest of five children. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry, and his mother was a teacher at a large Kabul high school. The family moved to Tehran, Iran in the early 1970s but returned to Kabul in 1973. The family relocated to Paris, France in 1976. Their plans to return to Kabul were thwarted by the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The Hosseini family was granted political asylum in the United States in 1980 and moved to San Jose, California. Khaled Hosseini lives in California with his wife Roya and their two children. In 2006 he was named a United States goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Education/Career: In 1984 Hosseini graduated from Independence High School in San Jose. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Santa Clara University in 1988 and entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where in 1993 he earned his Medical Degree. After completing his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, he was a practicing internist from 1996 until 2004. He began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, in 2001. Upon its release in 2003, it became an international bestseller and was eventually published in 48 countries. The novel was named the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Selection, a *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year, an *Entertainment Weekly* Top Ten Fiction Pick of the Year, an American Library Association Notable Book, and was the recipient of The American Place Theatre's Literature to Life Award. The highly successful film *The Kite Runner* was released in 2007. Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, was published in 2007 and quickly became a national bestseller. The novel was named Amazon's #1 book of the year and was named a 2008 ALA Best Book for Young Adults. The film version of the novel is slated for release in 2011.

Chapters 1–5

Mariam, a *harami*, or illegitimate child, lives with her mother, “Nana,” in a cottage on the outskirts of the village of Gul Daman, near the city of Herat. Her father, the wealthy Jalil Khan, visits her weekly. Though Nana is courteous to Jalil during these visits, she obviously does not respect him. Nana suffers from seizures for which she refuses treatment, and she is usually unhappy. Although she loves Mariam, Nana is often very critical of her. Jalil treats Mariam kindly, and Mariam idolizes her father, hoping he will someday claim her as his daughter. On Mariam’s fifteenth birthday, she defies Nana and visits Jalil’s home. Jalil refuses to admit Mariam, so she waits outside his estate the entire night. In Mariam’s absence, Nana commits suicide.

Vocabulary

culpable
minarets
façade
terra-cotta
incoherent
penance
recrimination
coveted
carnelian
lapis lazuli
vaulted
periphery
impassively
reproach
disillusionment

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the porcelain sugar bowl? What is foreshadowed when Mariam accidentally breaks it? *(The porcelain sugar bowl is one of Nana’s prized possessions. It is part of the tea set that is Nana’s sole relic of her mother. The bowl is painted with a dragon, which is supposed to ward off evil. The broken bowl foreshadows trouble and heartache for Nana and Mariam.)*
2. How does Nana react to the news of the free ice-cream day at Jalil’s theater? How does Mariam feel when Nana makes negative comments about Jalil? *(Nana comments that the children of strangers get ice cream and Mariam only gets the stories. Mariam is young and naïve, and she hates her mother speaking badly of Jalil. For the hour or two a week Mariam sees him, Jalil always seems kind, happy, and hopeful, a stark contrast to Nana’s bitter and disagreeable personality. Though Mariam does not understand some of what Nana says, Mariam wants so much to believe in her father and his love for her that she dismisses Nana’s negative view of Jalil.)*
3. Why does Nana refer to their cottage as a “rathole”? Do you think Nana’s statement is fair? *(It is a small home devoid of the luxury Jalil and the rest of his family enjoy. Answers will vary. Nana’s assessment is colored by her bitterness, but she has a right to be bitter—she and Mariam have been grievously slighted. However, the kolba is in a beautiful spot and Jalil makes sure everything Nana and Mariam need is delivered to them monthly. Though Jalil certainly has not given them the kind of life they deserve, such as equal status with his legitimate wives and children, they are still able to live a decent life.)*
4. What do you think of Nana’s version of Mariam’s birth as compared to Jalil’s? Whom do you believe, and why? Why does it “not occur to young Mariam to ponder the unfairness of apologizing for the manner of her own birth” (p. 11)? *(Answers will vary, but the two versions of Mariam’s birth are very different. In Nana’s version, Nana suffers greatly for two days without any help and Jalil is unconcerned about her or Mariam. In Jalil’s version, he makes sure that Nana receives hospital care and Mariam’s birth is over “within under an hour” [p. 12]. Though Jalil is out of town, he arrives as soon as distance and time allow. Both Nana and Jalil have reasons to stretch the truth. Nana’s bitterness taints her ability to portray Jalil positively. Jalil, on the other hand, is clearly concerned with others’ perception of him, and this could cause him to distort the facts of Mariam’s birth. Nana has always blamed Jalil for her and Mariam’s circumstances. Mariam is young and fears Nana, so apologizes to her mother for almost everything she does, including being born. Mariam knows Nana expects her to be apologetic for most things.)*

5. What are two examples of Jalil’s idea of penance? For what actions do you think Jalil is doing penance? Explain. *(Two examples are Jalil helping build the kolba and his sons’ monthly delivery of Nana and Mariam’s supplies. In Jalil’s mind [and through the lens of one who accepts the social class system he lives in], Jalil, a rich man, is shaming himself and making a great sacrifice by doing and making his sons do manual labor. Answers will vary. However, in Jalil’s view, he is probably doing penance not for his treatment of Mariam and Nana, but for disgracing his wives and his social class by committing adultery with a servant.)*
6. Who is Mullah Faizullah? Describe his relationship with Mariam. *(Mullah Faizullah is the elderly tutor in Gul Daman. He comes by to teach Mariam prayers, the Koran, and how to read. He has a grandfatherly relationship with Mariam, and she feels he understands her better than anyone except Jalil. He inspires and encourages Mariam to become educated.)*
7. How does Nana feel about Mariam attending school? Why do you think she feels this way? *(Nana tells Mullah Faizullah, “There is nothing out there for [Mariam]. Nothing but rejection and heartache.” Nana also tells Mariam, “You’re all I have. I won’t lose you to them” [p. 19]. Nana seems to feel that the obstacles posed by Mariam’s social class mean that any education Mariam receives will be wasted. She wants to shield Mariam from the pain and rejection she may encounter if she attends school. At the same time, Nana would miss Mariam if she left. Throughout Nana’s alienation and loneliness, Mariam has been her only steady comfort.)*
8. Why do you think Mariam wants to go to Jalil’s home? *(Answers will vary. Mariam is restless and curious about the world. She wants a better life than her mother had. Mariam has spent her whole life [nearly 15 years] isolated from society in the kolba. When Jalil visits he talks about movies and politics, takes Mariam fishing, and shows her how to draw. It is only natural that Mariam would want to experience his world and feel accepted in it, especially on her birthday.)*
9. What is the significance of the pebble game that Mariam plays in Chapter 5? *(Mariam organizes 10 pebbles into three columns to represent Jalil’s children by his three wives and adds a fourth column with one pebble to represent her. In this act the reader sees Mariam’s growing hope that she will be accepted as part of the family even though Jalil only acknowledges having 10 children. It also conveys the isolation Mariam feels.)*
10. How does Mariam feel as she sleeps on the street outside Jalil’s house? What is the author trying to communicate about Afghanistan with this situation? *(Jalil’s denial of Mariam shatters all of her hope and trust, giving credence to her feeling of being unworthy, lowly, and disgraced. In a historical sense, Hosseini is commenting on class struggles in his country by portraying a close-up, personal situation affected by Afghanistan’s social structure.)*
11. **Prediction:** What will happen to Mariam now that Nana is gone?

Supplementary Activities

1. Begin a Characterization chart like the one on page 36 of this guide for Mariam. Continue to fill in information as you read the novel.
2. Of the gender dynamic in Afghanistan, Nana says, “...Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman” (p. 7). Using this quote as a model, write a simile that you think describes the gender dynamic in the United States.
3. Write two journal entries in Mariam’s voice—one that describes a weekly visit with Jalil and the other that describes a day with Nana.