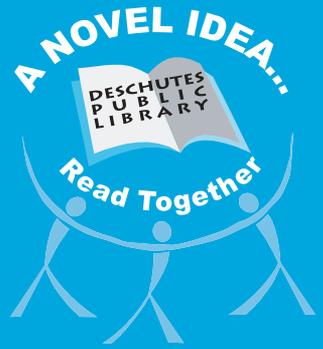


# READER'S Guide



## The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

A countywide reading project at your local  
Deschutes Public Library from April 10 – May 14, 2005.

# Acknowledgements

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Deschutes Public Library appreciates the contributions of Stacey Donohue and Crystal McCage to the creation of the Reader's Guide. Additional thanks to John Bowers for proofreading this document.

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# About The Project

**D**eschutes County now boasts one of the largest book clubs in the west! *A Novel Idea ... Read Together* is a reading program organized by the Deschutes Public Library that encourages residents of Deschutes County to read and experience a single work of fiction ... together. The program builds a sense of community throughout Deschutes County. Barriers are broken down as people from various socioeconomic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds share ideas, one read at a time. The project invites people to stretch beyond their comfort zone and broaden their sense of community. It adapts to the diverse communities and multigenerational audiences within Deschutes County.



*A Novel Idea ... Read Together*, is a multi-media, multifaceted series of events. The event kicks off mid-April during National Library Week and lasts through mid-May. Throughout the month, programs and events highlighting the selected novel are offered at libraries in Bend, La Pine, Redmond, Sisters, and Sunriver. These programs are designed to enhance the participant's knowledge of the novel in an entertaining and unexpected way.

Join in this celebration of the written word and discover the power of reading and discussing together this year's selection—*The Kite Runner*.

# Author Khaled Hosseini

**K**haled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965. He is the oldest of five children. His father worked for the Afghan foreign ministry and his mother was a teacher of Farsi and history at a large girls high school in Kabul.



In 1976, Khaled's family was relocated to Paris, France, where his father was assigned a diplomatic post in the Afghan embassy. The assignment would return the Hosseini family in 1980, but by then Afghanistan had already witnessed a bloody communist coup and the Soviet invasion. Khaled's family, instead, asked for and was granted political asylum in the U.S. He moved to San Jose, CA, with his family in 1980.

He attended Santa Clara University and graduated from UC San Diego School of Medicine. He has been in practice as an internist since 1996. He is married, has two children, a boy and a girl, Haris and Farah. *The Kite Runner* is his first novel.

# Afghanistan

Official Name \_\_\_\_\_ Islamic State of Afghanistan

Capital \_\_\_\_\_ Kabul

Official Languages \_\_\_\_ Dari, Pashto

Population \_\_\_\_\_ 28,513,677 (2004 estimate)

Land Area \_\_\_\_\_ 250,000 square miles  
(roughly the size of Texas)

Highest Point \_\_\_\_\_ Nowshak Peak (24,558 feet)

Border Countries \_\_\_\_ China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan,  
Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Official Religion \_\_\_\_\_ Islam (Sunni Muslims making up  
80% of the population and Shi'a  
with 19%, other religions 1%)

Main Exports \_\_\_\_\_ Cotton, fruits, nuts, carpets, hides,  
pelts, wool, opium (world's largest  
producer of opium)

Life Expectancy \_\_\_\_ 42 years

Current Average Age \_ 17 years

Government Type \_\_\_\_ Islamic Republic  
(elections held in October 2004)

Head of Government \_ Hamid Karzai  
(since 7 December 2004)

Constitution \_\_\_\_\_ New constitution drafted 14  
December 2003–4 January 2004;  
signed 16 January 2004

Independence \_\_\_\_\_ 19 August 1919 (from United  
Kingdom control over Afghan  
foreign affairs)<sup>1</sup>

## History

Afghanistan is a country with a long and rich history. Over the centuries, cultures have woven together to create the tapestry that is Afghanistan today. A basic understanding of Afghan history is helpful for reading *The Kite Runner*. Insights into characters and situations are understood more fully when evaluated against history. To distill the events, recent and ancient, includes thousands of years of history, a task not suited for this small *Reader's Guide*.

You can find many resources on Afghanistan at the Deschutes Public Library, and we encourage you to read further about the Afghan people, their culture and their vivid history. We have provided a list of resources in the back of this guide for further reading selections.

The following is a brief excerpt taken from the online *World Book* database available on the Deschutes Public Library website, [www.dpls.us](http://www.dpls.us). We've included it as a jumping off point, in hopes of providing some basic information that might help get your study of Afghanistan started.

**Afghanistan**, a nation in southwestern Asia, has great mountains, scorching deserts, fertile valleys, and rolling plains. Afghanistan does not have a seacoast. The country is bordered by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan on the north, China on the far northeast, Pakistan on the east and south, and Iran on the west.

Afghanistan is one of the world's least developed countries. Most Afghan workers farm the land, and many use old-fashioned farming tools and methods. Some of the people are nomads, who roam the country with their herds of sheep or goats. Kabul is the capital and largest city of Afghanistan.

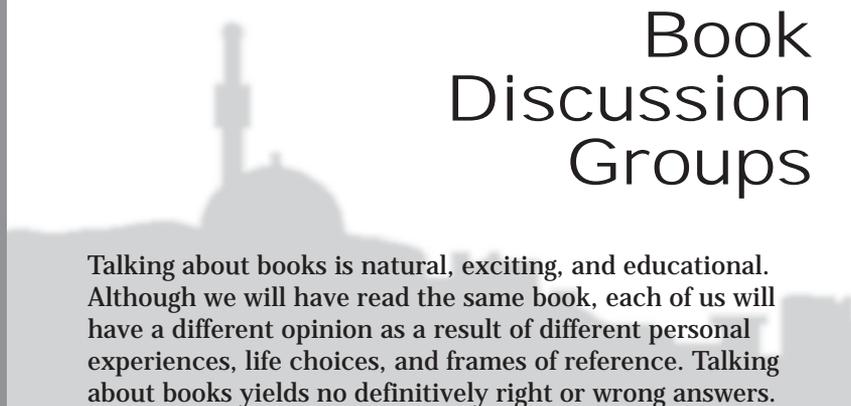
Almost all the people of Afghanistan are Muslims. The religion of the Muslims, Islam, is the chief common link among them. The population of Afghanistan consists of about 20 ethnic groups, most of which are divided into several tribes. Most of the ethnic groups have distinct

languages and cultures. The variety of ethnic groups has made it difficult for Afghanistan to develop into a unified, modern nation.

Afghanistan has a long and troubled history. In early days, Persians, Greeks, Mongols, and other peoples conquered the region. In modern times, Afghanistan has continued to suffer foreign interference. The Soviet Union sought to occupy Afghanistan in a war that lasted from 1979 to 1989. In the 1990's, a conservative Islamic group called the Taliban came to power. The Taliban allowed international terrorist organizations to create training camps in Afghanistan. Following terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001; the United States and anti-Taliban forces within Afghanistan drove the Taliban from power. A transitional government was established to rule the country.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CIA–The World Factbook, 2005  
[www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook)

<sup>2</sup>Thomas E. Gouttierre "Afghanistan." *World Book Online Reference Center*. 2004.  
World Book, Inc. 2 Dec. 2004.  
<<http://www.worldbookonline.com/wb/Article?id=ar006700>>.



# Book Discussion Groups

Talking about books is natural, exciting, and educational. Although we will have read the same book, each of us will have a different opinion as a result of different personal experiences, life choices, and frames of reference. Talking about books yields no definitively right or wrong answers. The keys to good book discussions are an open mind and allowing others the opportunity to share their perspectives without judgment.

The following questions are not the only questions raised by the novel, but serve to get the discussion started. A discussion group might get through all the questions or only one of them in a session. Enjoy the journey and don't worry too much about the destination.

## Discussion Questions

### Childhood

- 1 The author begins and ends the novel with Amir's favorite pastime, kite flying. At the novel's beginning, Amir, while looking for Hassan who is "running" his kite, witnesses a horrible tragedy. At the conclusion of the novel, Amir is once again flying kites, this time with Hassan's son. Why do you think he chooses to bookend the novel with kite flying?

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- 2 How does the relationship between Hassan and Amir parallel the historic/ongoing relationship between the Pashtuns and the Hazaras? The Sunni and Shi'a Muslims? The Iraqis and the Iranians? The Afghanis and the Pakistanis? Cain and Abel?
- 3 Why doesn't Hassan tell the truth about Amir after Amir puts the money under Hassan's mattress?
- 4 As an "epic" tale, *The Kite Runner* includes one-dimensional supporting characters like Hassan who is both heroic and saintly, and Assef who is purely evil. Why are one-dimensional characters useful in a novel?
- 5 Religion generally, and Islam specifically, is portrayed in all its diversity in the novel. Discuss how the many ways Islam is portrayed (Baba's secular vision, Ali and Hassan's piety, and Assef's cruelty justified by the Taliban) and what the author is suggesting about Islam and religion?
- 6 Amir's first written story that he shares with Rahim has "irony ... it is something that some writers reach for their entire careers and never attain" (32–33). What is irony, and why does Rahim value it so? What are the ironies in Khaled Hosseini's first novel? How are they similar or different than the ironies in Amir's first short story (page 31, top)?
- 7 One website notes that using glass on the strings of kites to cut down your opponent's kite and the subsequent race for the downed kites is not only an ancient Afghan

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hobby but also a metaphor for the violent tribal, religious, and government fighting throughout Afghanistan's history. It wasn't until the Taliban assumed power that kite flying was banned. Why? How is the kite flying episode in the first third of the novel different than the one in the last third? What does that suggest about the author's hope for the future of Afghanistan?

## America

- 1 How is this shift from upper to lower class for Amir and Baba when they immigrate to the United States significant in the novel? How is this shift significant for others who migrate to the U.S.?
- 2 Hosseini writes, "Baba loved the *idea* of America. It was living in America that gave him an ulcer." What does he mean by this? Why is this statement so significant?
- 3 How does Amir's relationship with his father change when they move to America?
- 4 Compare and contrast the way Baba adjusts to life in the United States with the way General Taheri (Soraya's father) adjusts. How are these characters significant in light of other immigrants to the United States?
- 5 When Baba tells Amir that he will not seek chemotherapy for his cancer, Amir is very upset and says, "What about me, Baba? What am I supposed to do" (156)? Why does Baba look at Amir with disgust? Why can't Amir be the man Baba wants him to be?

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- 6 When Soraya confesses her secret past to Amir, he opens his mouth to tell her about Hassan but hesitates and keeps his past a secret. Why can't Amir confess even to Soraya what he had done?
- 7 Why is it significant that Hosseini chose for Amir and Soraya to have "Unexplained Infertility?"
- 8 Compare and contrast the relationships of Soraya and Amir and their fathers. How have their upbringings contributed to these relationships?
- 9 How do the Afghan immigrants to the U.S. in the novel work to hold on to part of their culture? How do they work to assimilate?
- 10 What does Amir do to "escape" his past in the U.S.? Is he successful?

## Return To Afghanistan

- 1 Rahim Khan's statement "There is a way to be good again," encapsulates the theme of redemption. Consider Amir's chances of redeeming himself by returning to Afghanistan and attempting to rescue Hassan's son.
- 2 *Zendagi migzara* is an Afghani phrase that means *life goes on*. Rahim Khan uses the saying to describe the Afghan people. "We're a melancholic people, we Afghans," and continues, "we give in to loss, to suffering, accept it as a fact of life." Discuss how *life goes on* is played out in the characters in the novel.

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- 3 Rahim Khan tells Amir of Hassan's adult life, chronicling every detail from the return to Baba's house and the arrival of Hassan's mother to the birth of Hassan's son and his execution. Compare Amir's American life to Hassan's life in Afghanistan.
- 4 When Rahim Khan shares the secret of Hassan's parentage, much of the novel falls into place, primarily, Baba's affection for Hassan. In what ways is Amir changed and how is his view of Baba different? Compare Amir's former image of Baba with his revised one.
- 5 At the end of Chapter 18, Amir decides to return to Kabul to find Sohrab and begin his journey towards redemption. Consider what motivates Amir to return to Kabul. For Amir, return to his homeland is a painful process, both emotionally and physically. After, he is left with a scar on his upper lip reminiscent of Hassan's harelip scar. Discuss these two scars, one from a birth defect and one from a brutal beating, as the symbol between the two brothers.
- 6 Amir says to Farid, "I feel like a tourist in my own country." After a painfully accurate description of Amir's privileged childhood in Kabul, Farid says, "You've always been a tourist here, you just didn't know it." What is Farid implying?
- 7 Discuss the orphanage director's dilemma.
- 8 The character Assef reappears in Chapter 22. The author has described his villain as illustrating all that

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has gone wrong in Afghanistan. Compare Assef's personality to what has gone wrong in Afghanistan and discuss the author's intent of making Assef so impossibly evil.

- 9 The novel reaches a critical turning point when Amir makes his stand against Assef in Wazir Akbar Khan. Why does the author bring Amir, Assef and Sohrab together and why is it important in Amir's journey? Consider reasons why Amir laughs during the brutal beating he receives from Assef.
- 10 Early in the novel, Hassan threatens Assef with a slingshot. He never fires, but puts himself at risk while protecting Amir. Later in the story, Sohrab shoots Assef in the eye with his slingshot. What is important and satisfying about Sohrab's fighting back?
- 11 By the end of the novel has Amir redeemed himself and what role does Sohrab play in Amir's quest for redemption?
- 12 Were you satisfied with the novel's ending? Where do you see the characters in ten years?

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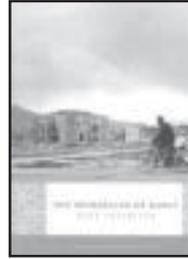
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# Related Reading

## **The Bookseller of Kabul**

by Asne Seierstad

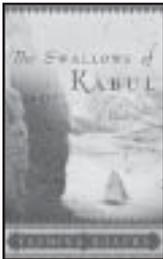
In Afghanistan, just after the fall of the Taliban, a bookseller named Sultan Khan allowed a Western journalist to move into his home and experience firsthand his family's life in the newly liberated capital city of Kabul. From that act of openness emerges this remarkable book, already an international best-seller—the most intimate look yet at ordinary life for those who have weathered Afghanistan's extraordinary upheavals. Through this close-knit household, we gain an intimate view—as few outsiders have seen it—of life in an Islamic country just beginning to find its way between the forces of modernity and tradition. —*Book Jacket*



## **The Swallows of Kabul: A Novel**

by Yasmina Khadra

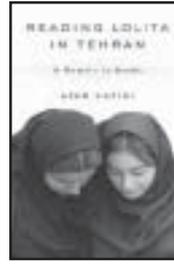
Set in Kabul under the rule of the Taliban, this novel takes readers into the lives of two couples. Mohsen comes from a family of wealthy shopkeepers whom the Taliban have destroyed; and Zunaira, his beautiful wife, once a brilliant teacher, is now no longer allowed to leave her home without escort or covering her face. Intersecting their world is Atiq, a prison keeper, a man who has sincerely adopted the Taliban ideology and struggles to keep his faith, and his wife, Musarrat, who once rescued Atiq and is now dying of sickness and despair. —*Book Jacket*



## **Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books**

by Azar Nafisi

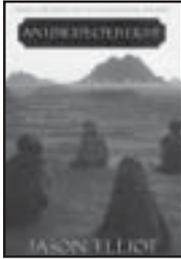
*Reading Lolita in Tehran* is the breathtakingly moving story of these young women and their clandestine meetings, and of Azar Nafisi's experiences teaching English literature in Iran. It is a tale of courage and heartache, an unforgettable story of seven remarkable women, and of the triumph of imagination. *-Book Jacket*



## **An Unexpected Light: Travels In Afghanistan**

by Jason Elliott

Part travelogue, part historical evocation, part personal quest, and part reflection on the joys and perils of passage, *An Unexpected Light* captures perfectly the emotional lure of a seldom-glimpsed world. It is a poignant look at Afghanistan and a heartfelt reflection on the experience of travel itself. *-Book Jacket*



## **The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan**

by Christina Lamb

A gold-inscribed invitation to a wedding in a foreign land led Christina Lamb at the age of twenty-one to leave suburban England for Peshawar on the frontier of the Afghan war. For two years she tracked the final stages of the mujahideen victory over the Soviets. Haunted by her experiences in Afghanistan, Lamb returns after the attacks on the World Trade Center to find out what had become of the people and places that had marked her life as a young graduate, and to report for Britain's *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper. Her unique perspective on Afghanistan and deep passion for the people she writes about makes this the definitive account of the tragic plight of a proud nation.

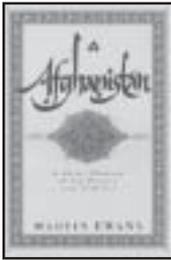
*-Book Jacket*



## **Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics**

by Martin Ewans

Fascinating, comprehensive, and timely, Martin Ewans examines the troubled history of a nation whose global relevance continues to hold the international spotlight. Reaching as far back as the seventh century A.D., Ewans shows how centuries of invasions, fierce tribal rivalries, and powerful dynasties led to the creation of an Afghan empire during the eighteenth century. From there he moves on to examine the various milestones on the country's road to the twenty-first century. What emerges in Ewans's lucid and dispassionate prose is the story of a once powerful empire

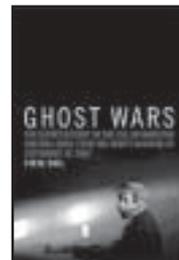


whose traditions and political stability have in recent years been reduced to ruins. Ewans, a former senior diplomat in the British embassy in Afghanistan, carefully and concisely weighs the lessons of history to provide a frank look at Afghanistan's fragile relationship with its neighboring countries and the national and international resonances of the Taliban's concept of Islamic society. *-Book Jacket*

## **Ghost Wars**

by Steve Coll

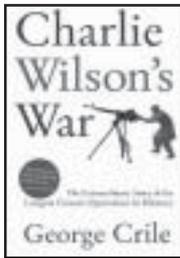
For nearly the past quarter century, while most Americans were unaware, Afghanistan has been the playing field for intense covert operations by U.S. and foreign intelligence agencies. From the Soviet invasion in 1979 through the summer of 2001, the CIA, KGB, Pakistan's ISI, and Saudi Arabia's General Intelligence Department all operated directly and secretly in Afghanistan. They primed Afghan factions with cash and weapons, secretly trained guerrilla forces, funded propaganda, and manipulated politics. Comprehensively and for the first time, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Steve Coll tells the secret history of the CIA's role in Afghanistan. *-Book Jacket*



## Charlie Wilson's War

by George Crile

In a little over a decade, two events have transformed the world we live in: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of militant Islam. *Charlie Wilson's War* is the untold story behind the last battle of the Cold War and how it fueled the new jihad. George Crile tells how Charlie Wilson, a maverick congressman from east Texas, conspired with a rogue CIA operative to launch the biggest, meanest, and most successful covert operation in the Agency's history. —*Book Jacket*



## Poetry by Rumi

The Persian poet and Sufi mystic Jalai ed-Din Rumi (1207–1273) was a brilliant lyrical poet who founded his own religious order, the Mevlevis. His poetry showed original religious and wonderfully esoteric forms of expression.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup>“Jalai ed-Din Rumi.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2nd ed. 17 Vols. Gale Research, 1998. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson Gale. 2005.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

# Program Calendar

- April 19** *Osama*  
Sisters Public Library  
6:00 p.m.
- April 20** Mission Afghanistan  
La Pine Public Library  
6:00 p.m.
- April 23** Encountering Islam  
11:00 a.m.—Redmond Public Library  
3:00 p.m.—Bend Public Library
- April 27** Afghanistan: Troubled Past and Uncertain Future  
Sisters Public Library  
6:00 p.m.
- April 28** Taste of Afghanistan  
Library Administration Conference Room, Bend  
6:00 p.m.
- The Man Who Would Be King*  
La Pine Public Library  
6:00 p.m.
- April 30** Book Discussion Group  
Sunriver Area Public Library  
1:00 p.m.
- Americanistan  
Redmond Public Library  
3:00 p.m.
- May 1** Americanistan  
Library Administration Conference Room, Bend  
2:00 p.m.
- Taste of Afghanistan  
Sunriver Area Public Library  
4:00 p.m.
- May 3** Book Discussion Group  
Sisters Public Library  
6:30 p.m.
- May 4** Mission Afghanistan  
Redmond Public Library  
6:00 p.m.
- Book Discussion Group  
La Pine Public Library  
6:30 p.m.

(more programs on back cover)

## Program Calendar *(continued from inside back cover)*

- May 7** Community Kite Flying Day  
Old Mill District  
10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.  
  
Kite Fighting Demonstration  
11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- May 9** Book Discussion Group  
12:00 noon–Library Administration Conference Room, Bend  
6:00 p.m.–Redmond Public Library
- May 10** *Osama* – 6:00 p.m.  
*The Man Who Would Be King* – 8:00 p.m.  
McMenamins Old St. Francis School
- May 11** *The Man Who Would Be King* – 6:00 p.m.  
*Osama* – 8:00 p.m.  
McMenamins Old St. Francis School
- May 12** Book Discussion Group  
La Pine Public Library  
12:00 noon
- May 14** **An Evening with Author Khaled Hosseini**  
**Tower Theatre**  
**7:00 p.m.**



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