

SANTA MONICA

# READS CITYWIDE

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CITYWIDE  
BOOK CLUB

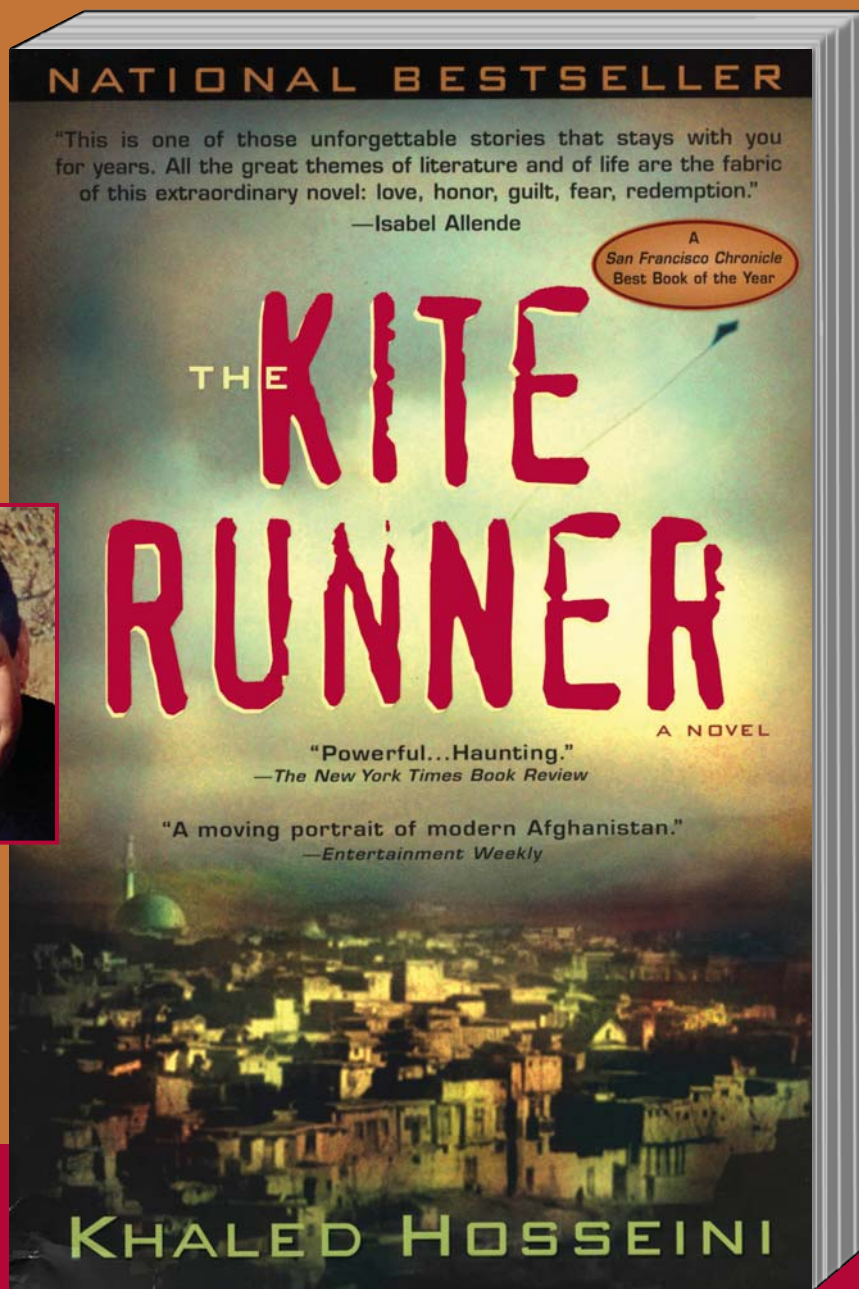
APRIL 12  
THROUGH  
MAY 21  
2005

For free public  
book discussion  
groups and  
other events,  
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A Riverhead Books paperback  
available at libraries and bookstores



## CITYWIDE READS

## WELCOME

Welcome to the third Santa Monica CITYWIDE READS program. This program encourages people who live or work in or visit Santa Monica to read the same book concurrently and come together to discuss it in book clubs held citywide.

This year's book is *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. Set in Afghanistan and in America, this novel traces the friendship of a privileged Afghan youth and a servant's son, in a tale that spans the demise of Afghanistan's monarchy, through the Soviet invasion, and the reign of the Taliban to the present day.

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, the author, Khaled Hosseini, immigrated with his family to northern California in 1980, where he has been a practicing physician since 1996. *The Kite Runner* is his debut novel and is the first Afghan novel to be written in English. As part of CITYWIDE READS, Dr. Hosseini is making a special appearance at Santa Monica College on May 21.

Some of the descriptions in this powerful novel will resonate with those in our community who have experienced war or civil unrest, or who may have immigrated to America. For others, the timeliness of a novel set in both Afghanistan and America will be thought-provoking. Whatever experiences you bring as a reader, this novel is certain to provide a framework for meaningful dialogue in our community.

*The Kite Runner* is available from the Santa Monica Public Library or your local bookstore. Plan on attending one of the many public book discussions or related events being held April 12 through May 21. I also hope you will make time to discuss the book informally with a friend or neighbor.

I hope that your participation in CITYWIDE READS is a rewarding experience that brings you together with your community through literature.



Pam O'Connor, Mayor,  
City of Santa Monica

## KHALED HOSSEINI

The author was born in Kabul in 1965, the eldest of five children. His mother taught Farsi and history at a girls' school and his father was a diplomat. In 1976, the Hosseini family moved to Paris, France for a diplomatic post, but the communist coup and the Soviet invasion prevented the family from returning to its homeland. They were granted political asylum in the United States and moved to San Jose in 1980. The Hosseini left everything behind, and the father found work as a driving instructor, a far cry from his position as a diplomat.

Khaled Hosseini graduated from Santa Clara University and the University of California San Diego School of Medicine. He is currently an internist and despite his successful start as a writer, plans to continue practicing medicine. He is married with two children and lives in the San Francisco area.

*The Kite Runner* began as a short story until Dr. Hosseini's father-in-law encouraged him to develop it into a novel. His second book, *Dreaming in Titanic City*, is due to be published in 2006.

## THE KITE RUNNER

*The Kite Runner* is a story about the relationship between two boys with different social statuses and the complicated relationship between a father and son. Set in Afghanistan and America, the novel spans three decades, providing glimpses into the little-known Afghan history and culture. Amir, the son of a prominent Kabul businessman and philanthropist, narrates the story. His best friend, Hassan, is Hazara, a minority group in Afghanistan. The two friends are inseparable until a fateful kite-fighting contest.

As real-life political events unfold, Amir and his father must abandon their home and move to California and begin again. Many years later, a call from his father's old partner causes Amir to journey back to a changed Afghanistan.

This coming-of-age tale was published in 2003 by Riverhead Books. *The Kite Runner* has become a bestseller and has received critical praise and many awards, including the *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year, a 2004 Alex Award as an Adult Book that Appeals to Teen Readers, and a Borders Original Voices® Award. A film version of the book is in production, due to be released in 2006.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the major themes of this book?
2. What is stronger in the novel: plot or character development?
3. What role do stories play in *The Kite Runner*?
4. How do the politics in Afghanistan affect Hassan?
5. What purpose does the character Rahim Kahn, Baba's partner, serve?
6. Why is Farid, Amir's driver on his trip back to Afghanistan, an important character?
7. What are some examples of irony in the book?
8. How are Amir and Baba similar?
9. How does immigration to California change Amir and Baba's relationship?
10. How is the confrontation with Assef, Amir's childhood bully, in Wazir Akar Kahn a turning point?
11. What does kite flying reveal about the characters?
12. In Hosseini's first draft, Amir marries a white American girl. How would this have changed the novel, and why did editors encourage him to revise it?
13. How would you characterize the ending of the novel?
14. What do you think Khaled Hosseini was trying to accomplish in this book?
15. A film version of *The Kite Runner* is in production. What aspects of the novel lend themselves to cinematic treatment?

## AFGHANISTAN and HOSSEINI'S STORY

Afghanistan, a nation in southwestern Asia, is bordered by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan and Iran. It is a largely undeveloped country of more than 250,000 square miles with a population of about 25 million. The majority of the Afghan people are farmers or nomads who have sheep or goats. Kabul is the capital city.

Almost 99% of the people of Afghanistan are Muslim. Most villages and groups have a religious leader, a mullah, who is very influential and educates the young. Though the people share the Islamic religion, there are many differences throughout the country. There are approximately twenty different ethnic groups, which are further divided into tribes. The largest ethnic groups are the Pashtuns and the Tajiks. *The Kite Runner's* Hassan and his father, Ali, are Hazaras, a minority group with a low status. The various ethnic groups have different languages and cultures, contributing to disunity within the country.

The true, turbulent history of Afghanistan plays a critical role in driving *The Kite Runner*. When the story begins, Amir enjoys a privileged childhood in the early 1970s. In 1973, a revolt overthrew the royal Zahir Shar and established the Republic of Afghanistan led by Muhammad Daoud Khan, a royal cousin. This is the first disruption of Amir's Kabul.

Kabul becomes dangerous for Amir and his father in the late 1970s. In 1978, rival leaders staged a revolt and Daoud was killed. Opposition to this new government believed that the policies were not in the Muslim tradition and the Soviet Union had too much control. The Soviets sent troops into Afghanistan to fight against the rebels from 1979 to 1989. In the novel, it is the Soviet invasion that forces Amir and his father to flee the country.

Many groups fought for control of Afghanistan in the beginning of the 1990s, until the conservative Islamic Taliban came to power. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir must return to Afghanistan and face the brutality of the Taliban regime. The Taliban leaders, Pashtun religious students exiled in Pakistan during the Soviet invasion, interpreted Islamic law harshly and imposed strict restrictions on the Afghan people, for example, banning most forms of entertainment. By the novel's end, Amir and his family find it strange to hear Afghanistan as the topic of conversation in America. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and the Taliban's harboring of Osama bin Laden, the man held responsible for the terrorist attacks, brought swift change for Amir's homeland as the United States and Great Britain launched massive air strikes against Taliban-held territories in Afghanistan.

Because of Afghanistan's turbulent history, many Afghan people became refugees or emigrated. In the 1920s and 1930s, Afghans immigrated to Washington, DC and other large cities on the East and West Coasts. The majority of the immigrants was well-educated and had been wealthy in their native land. Generally, new Afghan immigrants today still choose to reside in large urban areas, regardless of financial status.

In the 1980s, a large number of Afghan refugees settled in the San Francisco area. The Bay Area, including an expatriate community in Fremont, appeals to immigrants who like the open diverse communities. Fremont has become a center of Afghan culture, earning the nickname, Little Kabul.

## READ-ALIKES

*Crescent* by Diana Abu-Jaber, 2003.

The Arab community of Los Angeles comes alive in this poignant, graceful tale of American-born Sirine's romance with Iraqi scholar Hanif. Hanif must return home to find his siblings and face Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

*The Swallows of Kabul* by Yasmina Khadra, 2004.

Set in Kabul, this is the spare, harrowing tale of two couples and their tormented lives in Taliban Afghanistan. Former diplomat Moshen and former lawyer Zunaira become entangled with Atiq, a prison guard, and his ill wife.

*The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, 2003.

This a beautifully written story about an immigrant Indian family confronting assimilation and generational differences. The Pulitzer prize-winning author details the life of the American-born son, Gogol, trying to find his place in the world.

*Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje, 2000.

Forensic anthropologist Anil Tissera's search for a skeleton's identity leads her on an intense journey when she returns to her home in Sri Lanka to prove that mass murders are taking place. This lush, poetic story is beautifully told by Booker Prize winner Ondaatje.

For more ideas, check out NoveList, a reader's advisory database available online at [www.smpl.org/research](http://www.smpl.org/research).

## WEB RESOURCES

Khaled Hosseini's site: [www.khaledhosseini.com](http://www.khaledhosseini.com)

Translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab by Helen Zimmern, provided by The University of Adelaide in Australia: [etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/f52ek/part8.html](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/f52ek/part8.html)

Afghan History at Afghanistan Online: [www.afghan-web.com/history](http://www.afghan-web.com/history)

Kite-flying in Afghanistan: [www.afghana.com/Entertainment/Gudiparanbazi.htm](http://www.afghana.com/Entertainment/Gudiparanbazi.htm)

Many of the Library's online databases at [www.smpl.org/research](http://www.smpl.org/research) have relevant information.

## RELATED RESOURCES

*Veiled Courage: Inside the Afghan Women's Resistance* by Cheryl Benard, 2002. (305.40958 BENARD)

This book details the history of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan.

*Torn Between Two Cultures: An Afghan-American Woman Speaks Out* by Maryam Qudrat Aseel, 2003. (305.891593 ASEEL) Aseel, a first generation Afghan-American woman, engagingly describes her upbringing in Los Angeles as a woman in a modern Afghan family with traditional values.

*The Bookseller of Kabul* by Asne Seierstad, 2003. (958.1 SEIERSTAD) A Norwegian journalist presents his observations of the people of Kabul as Afghanistan rebuilds in 2002.

*Afghan Stories* by Taran Davies, 2002. (DVD 951.1 AFGHAN) A documentary depicts the lives of ordinary Afghan people in extraordinary circumstances.

## BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Trained volunteer facilitators lead these free public book discussions. No registration is required.

**Tuesday, April 12 – 7:30 pm**

Barnes & Noble, 1201 3rd Street Promenade

**Tuesday, April 19 – 1:30 pm**

Ken Edwards Center,\* 1527 4th Street

**Wednesday, April 20 – 7:00 pm**

Montana Ave. Branch Library,\* 1704 Montana Ave.

**Monday, April 25 – 2:15 pm**

Emeritus College, 1227 2nd Street, Room 407

**Saturday, April 30 – 11:00 am**

Teen Book Discussion: Café Bolivar, 1741 Ocean Park Blvd.

**Monday, May 2 – 7:00 pm**

Borders, 1415 3rd Street Promenade

**Thursday, May 5 – 11:15 am**

Santa Monica College Library, Room 193

**Saturday, May 7 – 11:00 am**

Fairview Branch Library,\* 2101 Ocean Park Blvd.

**Wednesday, May 11 – 7:00 pm**

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, 1426 Montana Ave.

**Sunday, May 15 – 2:00 pm**

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, 3150 Ocean Park Blvd.

**Thursday, May 19 – 7:00 pm**

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, 200 Santa Monica Blvd.

\*City of Santa Monica facilities are wheelchair accessible. To request a disability-related accommodation, call Library Administration 458-8606 (TDD 395-8499) at least 3 working days (Monday-Friday) in advance.

THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING FOR SUPPORTING  
BOOK DISCUSSIONS AND PROGRAMS:

**BARNES & NOBLE**  
BOOKSELLERS

**BORDERS**



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City of  
**Santa Monica**

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DATED MATERIAL

## SPECIAL CITYWIDE READS EVENTS

Free admission. Seating is on a first-arrival basis.

### What is it that Empire Steals?: U.S. Foreign Policy and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

**Saturday, April 16 – 2:00 pm**

Fairview Branch Library, 2101 Ocean Park Blvd.

Dr. Larry George, Professor of Political Science at CSU - Long Beach, talks about the novel in the context of Afghanistan and regional politics and the impact of U.S. foreign policy over the past several decades.

### *Kandahar*

**Friday, April 22 – 7:30 pm**

Montana Ave. Branch Library, 1704 Montana Ave.

Screening of the 2001 film that follows an Afghan émigré's perilous journey back home to rescue her sister who is living under Taliban rule. Written and directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf (85 min.).

### Santa Monica Festival

**Saturday, May 14 – noon to 7:00 pm**

Clover Park,\* 2600 Ocean Park Boulevard

Arohi Ensemble performs traditional music of southern Asia and the Library offers book-related children's craft workshops.

## Khaled Hosseini: In Conversation



**Saturday, May 21 / 4:00 to 5:30 pm**

Santa Monica College  
1900 Pico Blvd., Pavilion (Gym)

The author of *The Kite Runner* presents a reading and discusses his critically-acclaimed novel, followed by Q&A and book signing.

Co-sponsored by the Friends of the Santa Monica Public Library and the Santa Monica College Associates.