Southwest Licking School District
Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Ms. Lively
School: Watkins Memorial High School
Book Title: The Kite Runner
Genre: Fiction
Author: Khaled Hosseini
Pages: 371
Publisher: The Penguin Group – Riverhead Books
Copyright: 2003

Book Summary and summary citation
The Kite Runner is the story of Amir, a Sunni Muslim, who struggles to find his place in the world because of the aftereffects and fallout from a series of traumatic childhood events. An adult Amir opens the novel in the present-day United States with a vague reference to one of these events, and then the novel flashes back to Amir’s childhood in Afghanistan. In addition to typical childhood experiences, Amir struggles with forging a closer relationship with his father, Baba; with determining the exact nature of his relationship with Hassan, his Shi’a Muslim servant; and eventually with finding a way to atone for pre-adolescent decisions that have lasting repercussions. Along the way, readers are able to experience growing up in Afghanistan in a single-parent home, a situation that bears remarkable similarities to many contemporary households.

One of the biggest struggles for Amir is learning to navigate the complex socioeconomic culture he faces, growing up in Afghanistan as a member of the privileged class yet not feeling like a privileged member of his own family. Hassan and his father, Ali, are servants, yet at times, Amir’s relationship with them is more like that of family members. And Amir’s father, Baba, who does not consistently adhere to the tenets of his culture, confuses rather than clarifies things for young Amir. Many of the ruling-class elite in Afghanistan view the world as black and white, yet Amir identifies many shades of gray.

In addition to the issues affecting his personal life, Amir must also contend with the instability of the Afghan political system in the 1970s. During a crucial episode, which takes place during an important kite flying tournament, Amir decides not to act — he decides not to confront bullies and aggressors when he has the chance — and this conscious choice of inaction sets off a chain reaction that leads to guilt, lies, and betrayals. Eventually, because of the changing
political climate, Amir and his father are forced to flee Afghanistan. Amir views coming to America as an opportunity to leave his past behind.

Although Amir and Baba toil to create a new life for themselves in the United States, the past is unable to stay buried. When it rears its ugly head, Amir is forced to return to his homeland to face the demons and decisions of his youth, with only a slim hope to make amends.

Ultimately, The Kite Runner is a novel about relationships — specifically the relationships between Amir and Hassan, Baba, Rahim Khan, Soraya, and Sohrab — and how the complex relationships in our lives overlap and connect to make us the people we are.


Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the curriculum map(s):
Reading Grade Level Indicators Grade 11
AV 11.3
RP 11.1, 11.2
LT 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.5

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1
Amazon.com Review
In his debut novel, The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini accomplishes what very few contemporary novelists are able to do. He manages to provide an educational and eye-opening account of a country's political turmoil—in this case, Afghanistan—while also developing characters whose heartbreaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers long after the last page has been turned over. And he does this on his first try.
The Kite Runner follows the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, the boys are inseparable. They spend idyllic days running kites and telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted. Even after Amir and his father flee to America, Amir
remains haunted by his cowardly actions and disloyalty. In part, it is these
demons and the sometimes impossible quest for forgiveness that bring him back
to his war-torn native land after it comes under Taliban rule. ("...I wondered if that
was how forgiveness budded, not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain
gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of
the night.")

Some of the plot's turns and twists may be somewhat implausible, but Hosseini
has created characters that seem so real that one almost forgets that The Kite
Runner is a novel and not a memoir. At a time when Afghanistan has been thrust
into the forefront of America's collective consciousness ("people sipping lattes at
Starbucks were talking about the battle for Kunduz"), Hosseini offers an honest,
sometimes tragic, sometimes funny, but always heartfelt view of a fascinating
land. Perhaps the only true flaw in this extraordinary novel is that it ends all too
soon. --Gisele Toueg --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This review can be found at http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/1594480001/ref=dp_proddesc_0/103-1278937-4187807?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155.

Review #2
From Publishers Weekly
Hosseini's stunning debut novel starts as an eloquent Afghan version of the
American immigrant experience in the late 20th century, but betrayal and
redemption come to the forefront when the narrator, a writer, returns to his
ravaged homeland to rescue the son of his childhood friend after the boy's
parents are shot during the Taliban takeover in the mid '90s. Amir, the son of a
well-to-do Kabul merchant, is the first-person narrator, who marries, moves to
California and becomes a successful novelist. But he remains haunted by a
childhood incident in which he betrayed the trust of his best friend, a Hazara boy
named Hassan, who receives a brutal beating from some local bullies. After
establishing himself in America, Amir learns that the Taliban have murdered
Hassan and his wife, raising questions about the fate of his son, Sohrab. Spurred
on by childhood guilt, Amir makes the difficult journey to Kabul, only to learn the
boy has been enslaved by a former childhood bully who has become a prominent
Taliban official. The price Amir must pay to recover the boy is just one of several
brilliant, startling plot twists that make this book memorable both as a political
chronicle and a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our
adult lives. The character studies alone would make this a noteworthy debut,
from the portrait of the sensitive, insecure Amir to the multilayered development
of his father, Baba, whose sacrifices and scandalous behavior are fully revealed
only when Amir returns to Afghanistan and learns the true nature of his
relationship to Hassan. Add an incisive, perceptive examination of recent Afghan
history and its ramifications in both America and the Middle East, and the result
is a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium.

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What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?
Title: The Catcher in the Rye
Author: J.D. Salinger

Document any potentially controversial content:
- Language
- Brief sexual content
- Alcohol abuse
- Violence

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)
According to www.scholastic.com

GRADE LEVEL(S): 11

INTEREST LEVEL(S): 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable): Lexile 840L or grade level 6.8

Date Submitted to Website: 7-14-11