*The Kite Runner* Seminar

Wednesday, December 5

**Answer** **two** questions about chapters **11-18** of *The Kite Runner*. Answers should include a thesis statement, textual evidence and your analysis. Be sure to format your paper the “Bishop Way” (MLA format), include the question, and proofread before turning in at the *start of class* on Wednesday.

Next, **write three questions**. Ask a factual question that inspires conversation and not a simple answer. Ask two open-ended questions that invite thoughtful responses that move beyond the words on the page. Good discussion questions may have more than one right answer. Answer all three of your questions and include textual evidence with page numbers.

1. Why is Baba disappointed by Amir's decision to become a writer? During their argument about his career path, Amir thinks to himself: "I would stand my ground, I decided. I didn't want to sacrifice for Baba anymore. The last time I had done that, I had damned myself." What has Amir sacrificed for Baba? How has Amir "damned himself"?
2. In Chapter 8, Rahim Khan shares with Amir a story of his first love. How does that early experience, influence Rahim Khan’s relationship with Hassan and his family? What is the impact of prejudice?
3. When Amir and Baba move to the States their relationship changes, and Amir begins to view his father as a more complex man. Discuss the changes in their relationship. Do you see the changes in Baba as tragic or positive?
4. Compare and contrast the relationships of Soraya and Amir and their fathers. How have their upbringings contributed to these relationships?
5. Where does Amir meet with the dying Rahim Khan? What does Amir say about clichés? Why does Amir use the cliché about “an elephant in the room” to describe his meeting with Rahim Khan? What is the “elephant”?
6. In what ways does the narrative as related by Rahim Khan of Hassan’s life in Kabul show the power of redemption after a betrayal? How does the author weave politics into Hassan’s story and what impact does that have on the theme of redemption?
7. Explain the significance of this quote and connect to one of the themes with evidence: “Come. There is a way to be good again, Rahim Khan had said on the phone just before hanging up. Said it in passing, almost as an afterthought” (192).
8. Baba and Amir know that they are very different people. Often it disappoints both of them that Amir is not the son that Baba has hoped for. When Amir finds out that Baba has lied to him about Hassan, he realizes that "as it turned out, Baba and I were more alike than I'd never known." How does this make Amir feel about his father? How is this both a negative and positive realization?

Sample response:

From the Lit Log Chapter One: At the end of the chapter, we learn that Amir’s first word was “Baba,” and Hassan’s first word was “Amir.” Amir says he thinks that “the foundation for what happened in the winter of 1975—and all that followed—was already laid in those first words” (11). Discuss the significance of these “first words.” What might they foreshadow? What do they suggest about the relationship between Amir and Hassan, and what do they suggest about the relationship between Amir and Baba?

The power in the relationships between Amir and Baba, and Amir and Hassan are hinted in both boy’s first words. The second half of the novel further explores the father and son relationship, but it’s evident from the beginning that Amir worships his father and repeatedly tries and fails to receive his approval. In the first ten chapters, Hassan’s devotion and loyalty to Amir is proven several times.

In many ways, Amir’s attitude towards Hassan is due to deeply ingrained societal racism. Hassan is a Hazara and Amir is Pashtun; their relationship is structured by societal and economic differences. Baba and Ali’s relationship serves as a model, in addition to the centuries old religious divide between Shi’a and Sunni. Despite all of that, Amir knows he is cruel at times to Hassan and that his sense of superiority is false. In Chapter Six, Amir asks Hassan if he would eat dirt if Amir told him to. “I knew I was being cruel,” he reflects. In this incident, like many others, Hassan in his simple, honest, moral way questions Amir’s integrity in making such a request of Hassan. Like many other times, Hassan remains steadfastly loyal. Hassan knows Amir like no one else, and even as he leaves the only home he’s known, he does not betray Amir to Baba. Hassan’s devotion to Amir foreshadows a future relationship.

**Themes** to ponder when answering two questions and, also, writing three questions and answers of your own.

**Betrayal**: The betrayal of a loyal friend by a wealthier, more corrupt ‘master’ is a recurring motif. Amir and Baba’s feelings of guilt for their betrayals drive much of the novel’s action.

**Redemption**: The quest for redemption makes up much of the novel’s plot and expands as a theme to include both the personal and the political. Throughout his childhood, Amir’s greatest struggle was to redeem himself to Baba for ‘killing’ his mother during childbirth, and for growing up a disappointing son who was unlike Baba himself. Hosseini subtly connects these personal quests for redemption to Afghanistan itself.

**Fathers and Children**: The most important relationships in the novel involve fathers and sons; also General Taheri and his daughter, Soraya.

**Violence and Rape**: The ultimate act of violence and violation (short of murder) that drastically changes the lives of both the characters and the country. As Baba told the young Amir, the only real crime is theft, and rape is a theft of safety and selfhood; in the novel this brutality is inflicted upon both individual characters and the country of Afghanistan.

**Memory and the Past**: Many characters are haunted by memories of the past: Amir, Baba, and Sohrab. There is also another kind of memory, which is nostalgia for good things. Amir remembers his good times with Hassan as a child, and the old, beautiful Kabul before it was destroyed by war. These good memories bring sadness for what was lost, but also hope for what could be.