

# Identity

***The Son of Man***  
Rene Magritte 1964



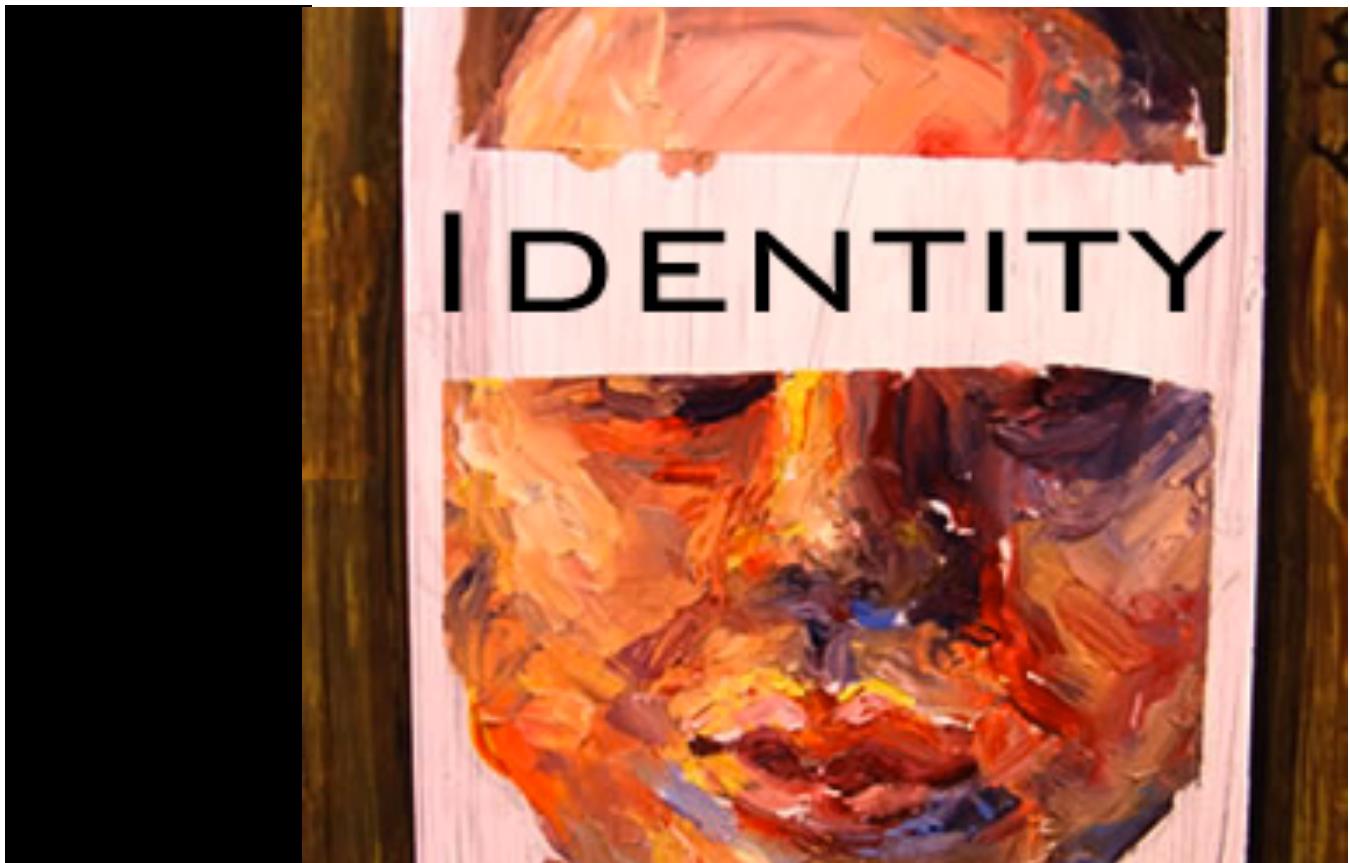
## Area of Study

In the Area of Study, students explore and examine relationships between language and text, and interrelationships among texts. They examine closely the individual qualities of texts while considering the texts' relationships to the wider context of the Area of Study. They synthesise ideas to clarify meaning and develop new meanings. They take into account whether aspects such as context, purpose and register, text structures, stylistic features, grammatical features and vocabulary are appropriate to the particular text.



## Table of Contents

Area of Study: Introduction	pg. 3
Core Text: <b>The Kite Runner</b>	pg. 5
About the author - <b>Khaled Hosseini</b>	pg. 7
'The Kite Runner' - Study Guide	pg. 8
'The Kite Runner' - Commentary	pg. 12
Related Texts:    ' <b>The Lovers II</b> ' - Rene Magritte	pg. 15
' <b>Fight Club</b> ' - David Fincher	pg. 16
' <b>Crash</b> ' - Paul Haggis	pg. 17
' <b>Life of Pi</b> ' - Yann Martel	pg. 19



## Introduction

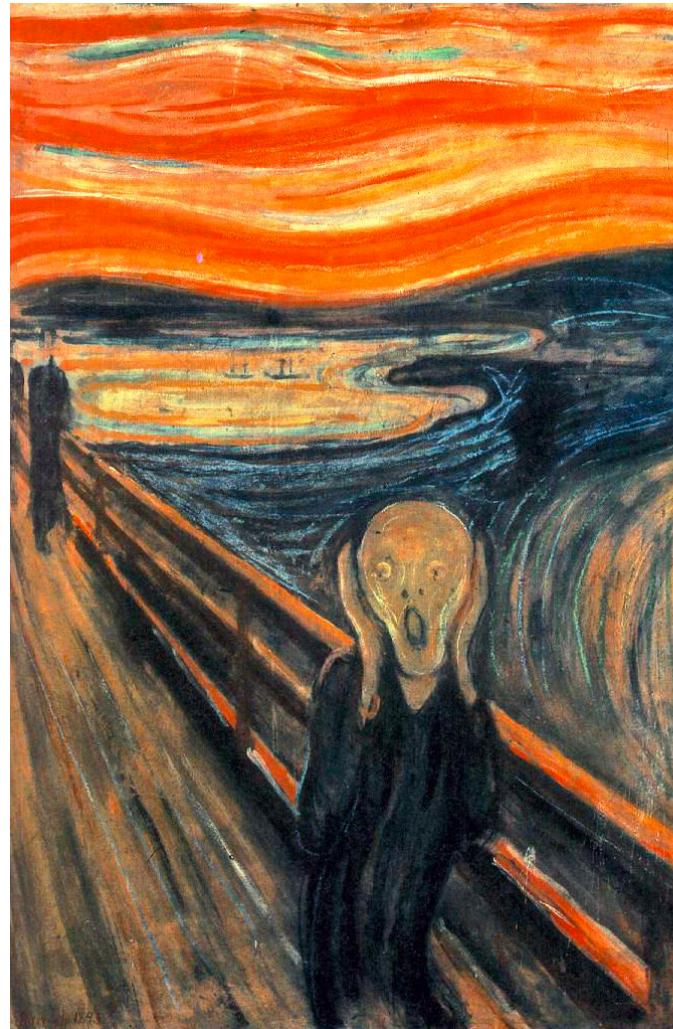
This Area of Study requires students to explore the ways in which the concept of identity is represented in and through texts.

Perceptions and depictions of identity vary. These perceptions are shaped within personal, cultural, historical and social contexts. A sense of identity can emerge from the connections made with people, places, groups, communities and the larger world. Within this Area of Study, students may consider aspects of identity in terms of experiences and notions of self, relationships, acceptance and understanding.

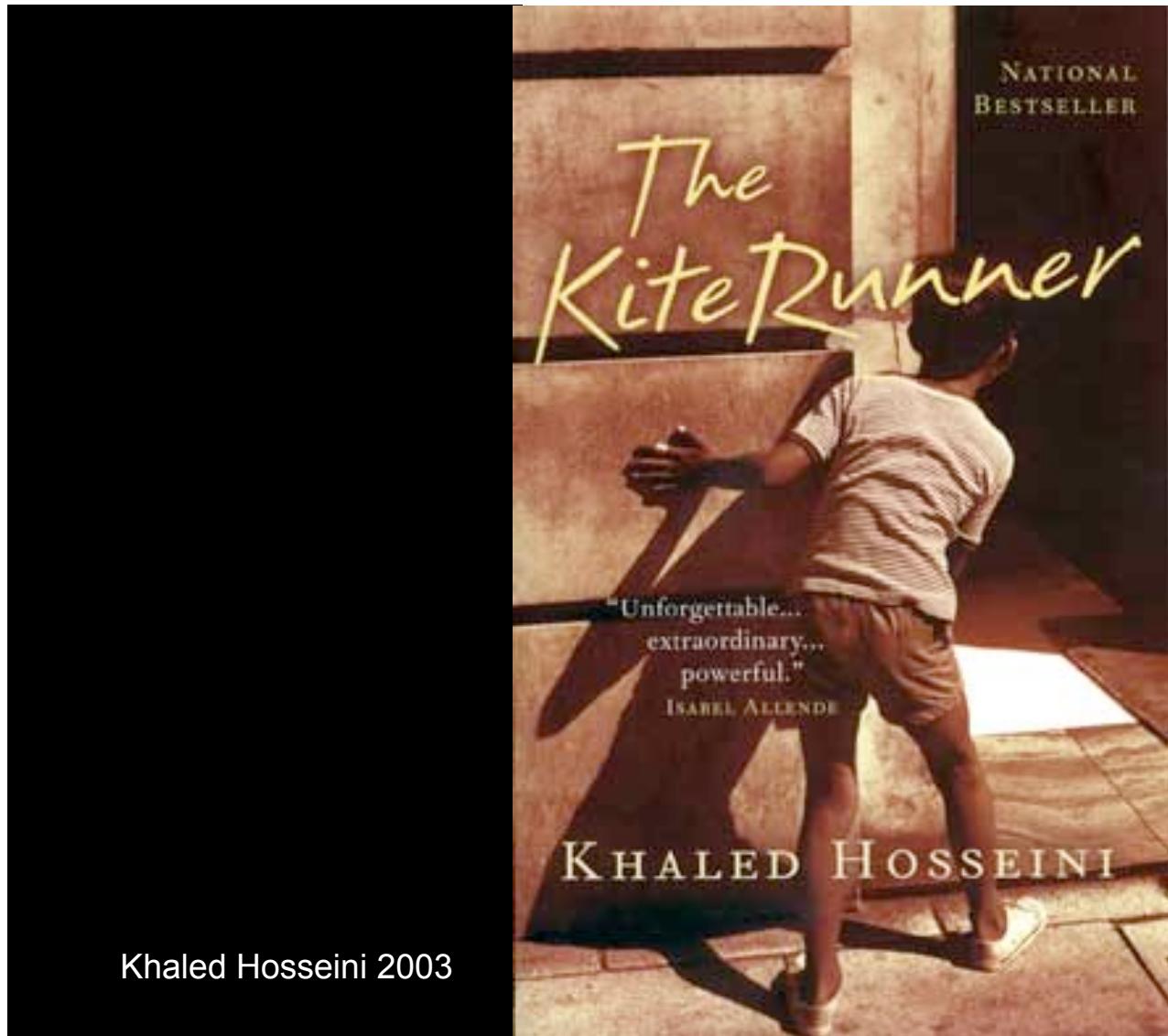
Texts explore many aspects of identity, including the potential of the individual to access or reject a community or group. They may reflect the way attitudes to identity are modified over time. Texts may also represent the desire to consolidate one's identity, or impediments to this desire.

Perceptions and depictions of identity in texts can be constructed through a variety of language modes, forms, features and structures. In engaging with the text, a responder may experience and understand the possibilities presented by a sense of identification with, or estrangement from, the text and the world it represents. This engagement may be influenced by the different ways perspectives are given voice in or are absent from a text.

In their responses and compositions students examine, question, and reflect and speculate on:



- how the concept of identity is conveyed through the representations of people, relationships, ideas, places, events, and societies that they encounter in the prescribed text and texts of their own choosing related to the Area of Study
- assumptions underlying various representations of the concept of identity
- how the composer's choice of language modes, forms, features and structures shapes and is shaped by perceptions of identity
- their own experiences of the consolidation, or problematising, of identity, in a variety of contexts
- the ways in which they perceive the world through texts
- the ways in which exploring the concept and significance of identity may broaden and deepen their understanding of themselves and their world.



## The Kite Runner Introduction

Taking us from Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy to the present, *The Kite Runner* is the unforgettable, beautifully told story of the friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan nonetheless grow up in different worlds: Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazara, member of a shunned ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade and Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, Amir thinks that he has escaped his past. And yet he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him.

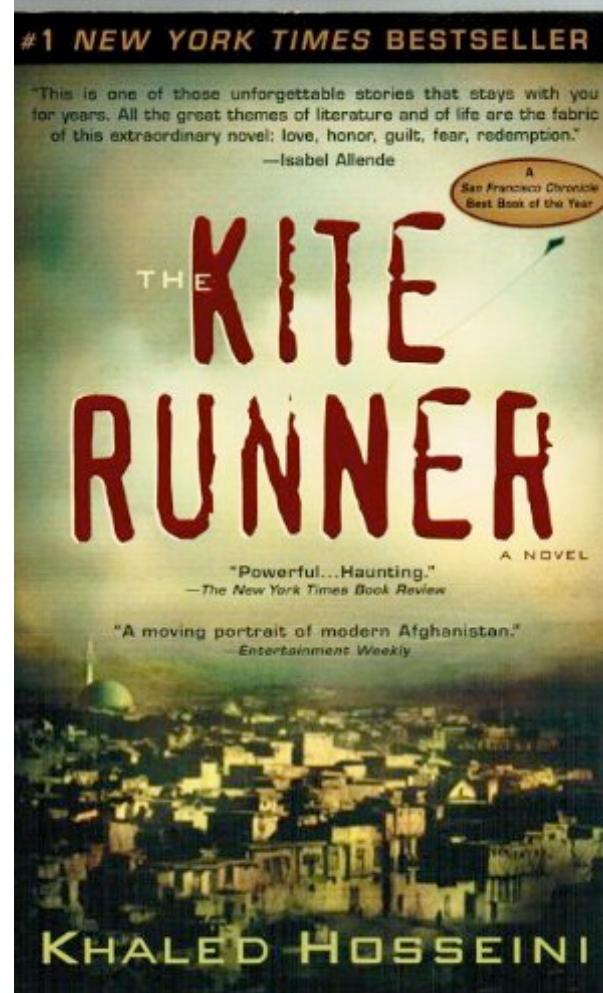
The Kite Runner is a novel about friendship, betrayal, and the price of loyalty. It is about the bonds between fathers and sons, and the power of their lies. Written against a history that has not been told in fiction before, *The Kite*

Runner describes the rich culture and beauty of a land in the process of being destroyed. But with the devastation, Khaled Hosseini also gives us hope: through the novel's faith in the power of reading and storytelling, and in the possibilities he shows for redemption.

## Conceptual Framework

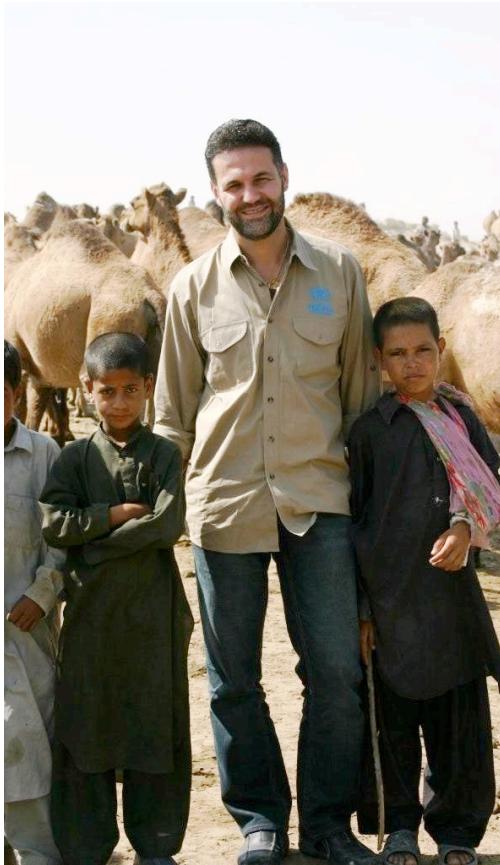
Our study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and other related texts will revolve around such ideas as:

- the influence of society and context
- inner conflict and making choices
- developing awareness and perceptiveness
- paths to self-knowledge



The above framework will provide the basis of our study, allowing opportunities to examine closely various portrayals of identity and personal responses to them in a range of contexts. Specifically, students must remain conscious of the context of the studied texts, their conceptual focus and, of course, the technical features of these texts.

Further, students will need to investigate other (related) texts that explore perceptions of identity and depictions of it. These texts will be required for upcoming extended responses.



# About the Author Khaled Hosseini

[www.khaledhosseini.com](http://www.khaledhosseini.com)

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a large high school in Kabul. In 1976, the Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then Afghanistan had already witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet army.

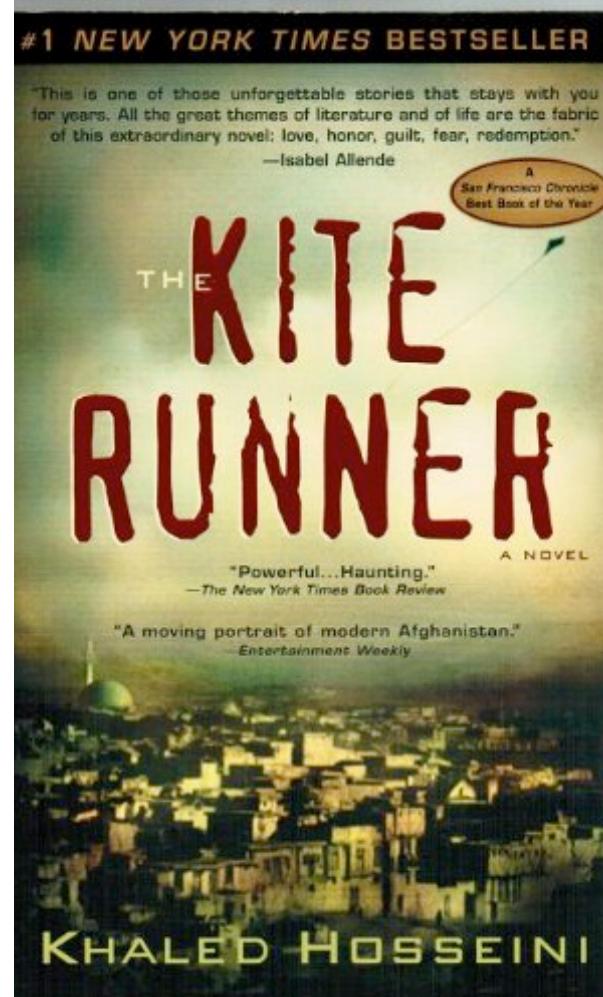
The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the United States. In September of 1980, Hosseini's family moved to San Jose, California. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Biology in 1988. The following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where he earned a Medical Degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Hosseini was a practicing doctor between 1996 and 2004.

While in medical practice, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, in March of 2001. In 2003, *The Kite Runner*, was published and has since become an international bestseller, published in 70 countries. In 2006 he was named a goodwill envoy to UNHCR. He lives in northern California.

# The Kite Runner Study Guide

1. The novel begins with Amir's memory of peering down an alley, looking for Hassan who is kite running for him. As Amir peers into the alley, he witnesses a tragedy. The novel ends with Amir kite running for Hassan's son, Sohrab, as he begins a new life with Amir in America. Why do you think the author chooses to frame the novel with these scenes? How is this significant to the framing of the novel?

2. The strong underlying force of this novel is the relationship between Amir and Hassan. Define their friendship. Why



is Amir afraid to be Hassan's true friend? Why does Amir constantly test Hassan's loyalty?

3. After the kite running tournament, why does Amir no longer want to be Hassan's friend?

4. Early in Amir and Hassan's friendship, they often visit a pomegranate tree where they spend hours reading and playing. 'One summer day, I used one of Ali's kitchen knives to carve our names on it: 'Amir and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul.' Those words made it formal: the tree was ours.' In a letter to Amir later in the story, Hassan mentions that "the tree hasn't borne fruit in years.' Explain the symbolism of this tree within the novel.

5. We begin to understand early in the novel that Amir is constantly vying for Baba's attention and often feels like an outsider in his father's life, as seen in the following passage: 'He'd close the door, leave me to wonder

why it was always grown-ups time with him. I'd sit by the door, knees drawn to my chest. Sometimes I sat there for an hour, sometimes two, listening to their laughter, their chatter.' Explain Amir's relationship with Baba.

6. After Amir wins the kite running tournament, his relationship with Baba undergoes significant change. However, while they form a bond of friendship. Eventually, the relationship between the two returns to the way it was before the tournament, and Amir laments 'we actually deceived ourselves into thinking that a toy made of tissue paper, glue, and bamboo could somehow close the chasm between us.' Explain the significance of this passage.

7. As Amir remembers an Afghan celebration in which a sheep must be sacrificed, he talks about seeing the sheep's eyes moments before its death. 'I don't know why I watch this yearly ritual in our backyard; my nightmares persist long after the bloodstains on the grass have faded. But I always watch, I watch because of that look of acceptance in the animal's eyes. Absurdly, I imagine the animal understands. I imagine the animal sees that its imminent demise is for a higher purpose.' Why do you think Amir recalls this memory when he witnesses Hassan's tragedy in the alley way? Amir recollects the memory again toward the end of the novel when he sees Sohrab in the home of the Taliban. Explain the use of this image in the context of the novel.

8. America acts as a place for Amir to bury his memories and a place for Saba to mourn his. In America. there are 'homes that made Baba's house in Wazir Akbar Khan look like a servant's hut.' What Is ironic about this statement? What is the function of irony in this novel?

9. What is the significance of the irony in the first story that Amir writes? After hearing Amir's story, Hassan asks, 'Why did the man kill his wife? In fact, why did he ever have to feel sad to shed tears? Couldn't he have just smelled an onion?' How is his reaction to the story a metaphor for Amir's life?

10. 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 and how has Amir 'damned himself'?



11. Compare and contrast the relationships of Soraya and Amir and their fathers. How have their upbringings contributed to these relationships?

12. Discuss how the ever-changing politics of Afghanistan affect each of the characters in the novel.

13. On Amir's trip back to Afghanistan, he stays at the home of his driver, Farid. Upon leaving he remarks: 'Earlier that morning, when I was certain no one was looking, I did something I had done twenty-six years earlier, I planted a fistful of crumpled money under the mattress.' Why is this moment so important in Amir's journey?

14. Throughout the story, Baba worries because Amir never stands up for himself. When does this change?

15. Amir's confrontation with Assef in Wazir Akar Khan marks an important turning point in the novel. Why does the author have Amir, Assef, and Sohrab all come together in this way? What is the significance of the scar that Amir develops as a result of the confrontation?

16. While in the hospital in Peshawar, Amir has a dream in which he sees his father wrestling a bear; 'They role over a patch of grass, man and beast .. they fall to the ground with a loud thud and Baba is sitting on the

bear's chest, his fingers digging in its snout. He looks up at me. and I see, He's me. I am wrestling the bear.' Why is this dream so important at this point in the story?



17. Amir and Hassan have a favourite story. Does the story have the same meaning for both men? Why does Hassan name his son after one of the characters in the story?
18. 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 realises 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?
19. When Amir and Baba move to the United States their relationship changes, and Amir begins to view his father as a more complex man. Identify the changes in their relationship and explain whether these changes are positive or negative?
20. The novel deals with betrayal within the relationship between master and servant. Do you think that such betrayals are inevitable in the master servant relationship, or do you feel that they are due to flaws in Baba's and Amir's characters, or are they the outcome of circumstances and characters?



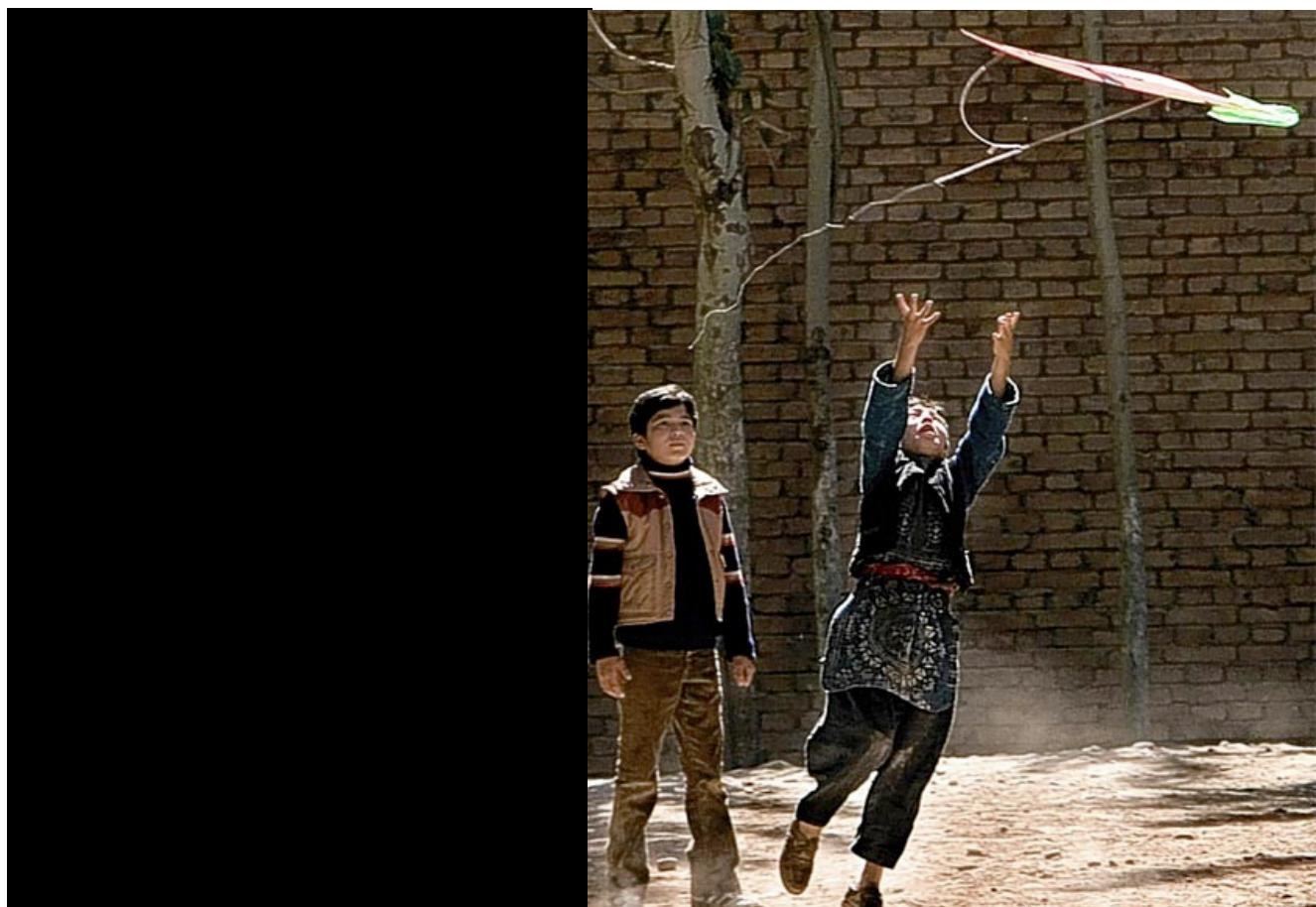
## The Kite Runner Commentary

In Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*, the protagonist Amir finds himself, as a man of thirty-eight, reflecting on his recent experience where his past 'had come calling'. Up to that point he had tried hard to bury his shameful memories of the way he handled watching the abuse of his friend Hassan when he was twelve years old and did nothing to stop it. Like most of us he had heard the oft-repeated advice of wise heads that 'the past is the past' and that 'the way forward is to get on with your life'. But as he admits at the very outset he was to discover that the past has its way of clawing out.

The event that is at the centre of this story is his act of cowardice when Hassan, the son of his father's Hazara servant, is caught in an alley and viciously raped by one of their neighbourhood thugs intent on revenge. Rather than standing up for Hassan as Hassan has done for him on occasions, Amir hides and then commences a charade to cover it up. He firstly tries to bury his shame by avoiding and ignoring Hassan. 'I made

'sure our paths crossed as little as possible, planned my day that way.' (p. 83) He then comes up with a plan to falsely accuse Hassan of theft and force his removal from their house. The Soviet invasion then intervenes and forces Amir and his father Baba to escape and forge a new life in America. 'For me, America was a place to bury my memories.' Amir immerses himself in study, finds a suitable partner and tries as best he can to be a worthy son to his dearly loved but disoriented father.

Only very occasionally do the memories of Hassan and the shame of his past come to mind, such as on the evening of his graduation when Baba says he wishes Hassan had been here with them and Amir finds himself feeling choked by steel hands. Amir is aware that like Soraya he has a secret; 'I'd betrayed Hassan, lied, driven him out, and destroyed a forty-year relationship between Baba and Ali'. But unlike Soraya he has kept it hidden from anyone else. Cowardice is still his approach. It is finally a phone call from his father's friend in Pakistan which jolts him back to some level of accountability. The invitation to visit him, Amir realised later, was set up by Rahim Khan in order to give him the opportunity to right the wrong he had committed, 'a way to be good again'.



The visit to Pakistan makes Amir aware of the fate that Hassan and his family have met and the tragedy that has enveloped Afghanistan over the years. He also discovers truth about his father that rocks his preconceptions. Amir is faced with a choice. He can deal with some of the shame that lies beneath the surface of his own heart and address his cowardice or he can return to the safety and sanctuary of his new life. The dreams that are woven into the novel show the way the past has haunted him. For example, he sees himself as the man holding the rifle and blasting Hassan's head as he kneels blindfolded on the street. Indeed the past has clawed its way up to the surface. Our subconscious mind has a way of doing that.

Amir chooses to return to Afghanistan and grasp 'this one last chance at redemption.' It takes the form of finding Hassan's son, Sohrab, who has been left orphaned. It also involves having to risk his life and be brutally injured in order to finally stand up to Assef. With the breaking of his ribs and the pain of the bodily assault he admits that 'for the first time, since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace.' Amir, then, has the character to go through the traumas that lie ahead and to take the responsibility for Sohrab's future because he has learnt for himself what loyalty and courage entails. The past has not only clawed its way out, it has provided a way forward.



# Related Texts



## *The Lovers II*

Rene Magritte 1928

## The Lovers II

Rene Magritte 1928

Much has been written about the Lovers relating the sheets covering the lovers' faces to the the nightgown found covering the face of Magritte's mother after she was found drowned in the Sambre River when Rene was 13 years old. Although this may be an unconscious icon for Rene, his main interest is coving up the face to make the knowable- unknowable. He uses a number of images to cover faces including flowers, birds and apples. It makes the viewer yearn to see what is behind the object, and gives the object or person... mystery.



## Fight Club (1999)

David Fincher

'The first rule about Fight Club is that you don't talk about Fight Club. The second rule about Fight Club is that you don't talk about Fight Club.' Based on the novel by Chuck Palahniuk, David Fincher's film stakes out manly territory in 1999's most intriguing, angry, yet witty cinematic fantasy. Spectacularly popular, Fight Club is nevertheless as morally challenging as it is visually memorable.

Edward Norton plays the mild-mannered narrator who, tortured by his empty office life, goes to 12-step support group meetings just to feel something. At one of these meetings, Jack meets and falls for Marla (Helena Bonham Carter), and later hooks up with the dangerously wild Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). Tyler convinces Norton that his life can be better lived by learning how to fight. Soon enough, their street fighting antics attract other men, giving them all something that their ordinary lives are lacking - a sort of dirty, aggressive dignity which is eventually reorganised into a virtual terrorist cell. With astonishing camera and special effects work, Fight Club moves at rocket-like pace and is the kind of exciting, distressingly inspiring movie that makes even the strangest event seem normal, including Meat Loaf as a cancer patient with enormous mammary glands. Look out for the big twist in the ending.



## Crash (2004)

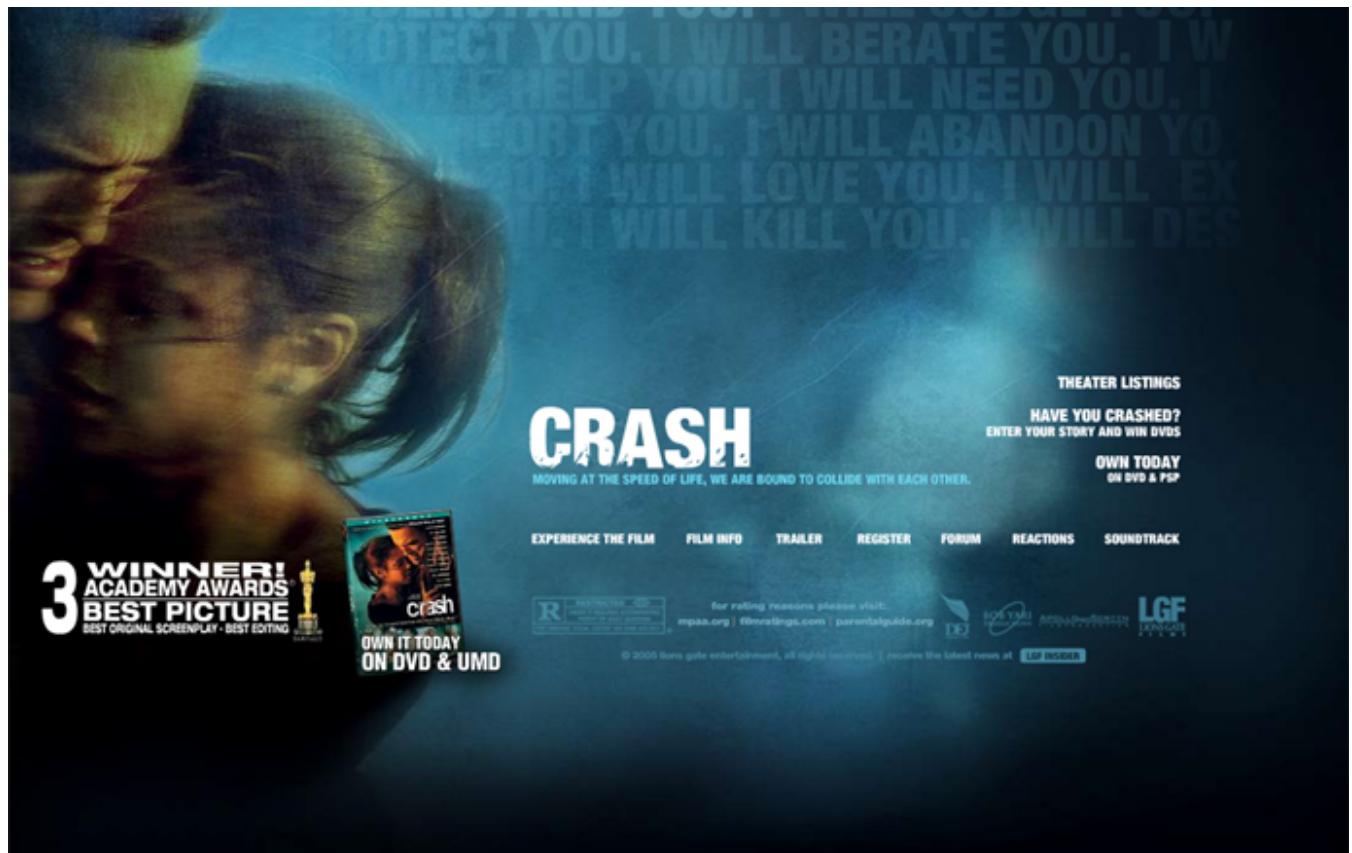
Paul Haggis

A metaphorical title used a blunt force theme, Paul Haggis's 2005 Academy Award winning Best Picture Crash is about the side effects of Los Angelenos interrupting each other's lives. Insert your preferred ethnic conflict (Latins v Asians), ripen with any available inciting event (robbery), and the scope is suddenly quite broad but clear.

Yes, the film's conceit about exposing human interconnectedness is trite. Yes, the story conflicts are hyperbolically extreme. Yes, the knowing, multi-culty insults grow stale. But the film's undeniable power is found in small snatches of perfectly pitched dialogue delivered by closely observed characters coming alive within contrivances of plot.

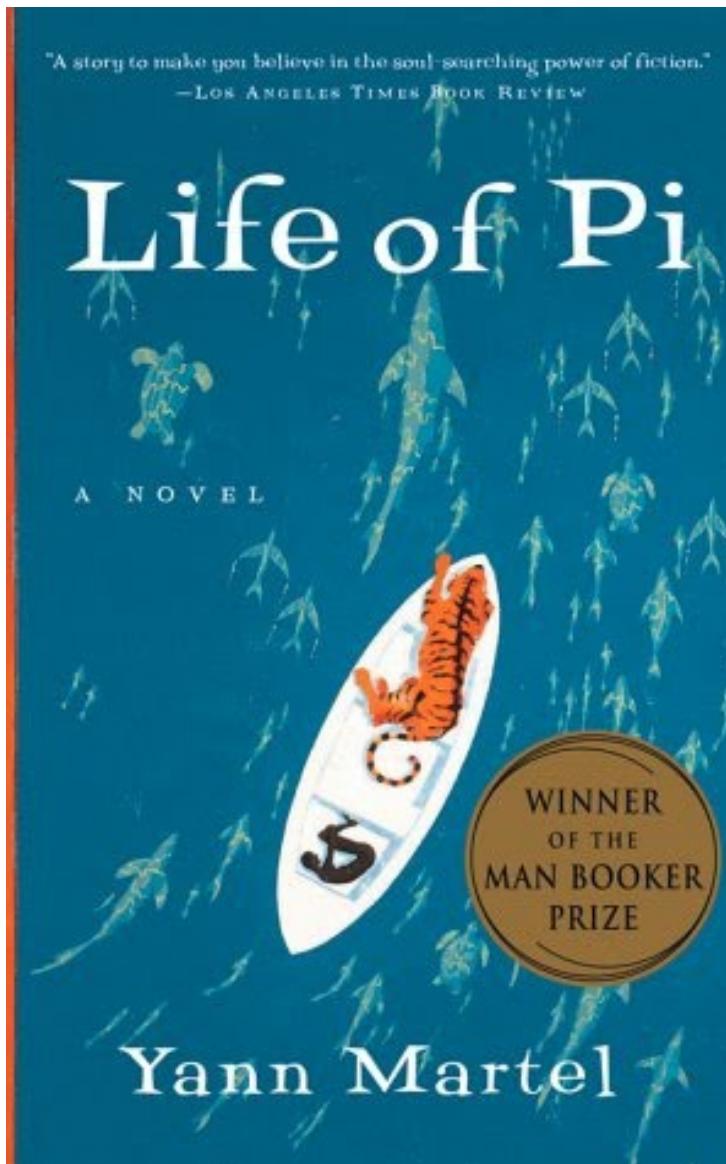
Standout characters include: Detective Waters (Don Cheadle) and his partner Ria (Jennifer Esposito) who investigate a murder; the Cabots, power-hungry DA Rick (Brendan Fraser) and his bitchy wife Jean (Sandra Bullock), reacting to being car-jacked by two crooks who bite off more than they can chew; Officer Ryan (Matt Dillon) and his partner Tom (Ryan Phillippe) who harass a yuppie couple, the Thayers, TV director Cameron

# Identity



pulls together, exposing the sharp edges of living among unlike people. Written by Haggis and Bobby Moresco.

Crash is neither realistic nor fantasy. Built upon expressing closely-held bigotry, characters navigate a post-PC age when mere speech carries power, inasmuch as we are able to treat one another badly or well, depending on circumstances.



# Life of Pi

Yann Martell

This book, which won the Man Booker Prize in 2002, is the story of Pi Patel, the sixteen year-old son of a zookeeper from Pondicherry, India. Pi is a religious zealot, he's just not sure which religion he's zealous about, attracting different beliefs 'like flies' to become a practising Christian, Muslim and Hindu all at the same time. Planning a move to start a new life in Canada, Pi's father packs up the belongings and the menagerie, and the family set

off aboard a freighter. After a terrifying shipwreck, Pi finds himself adrift in the Pacific ocean, trapped on a twenty-six-foot lifeboat with a wounded zebra, a spotted hyena, a seasick orangutan, and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. After Richard Parker dispatches the others, Pi must use all his zoological knowledge, wits and faith to stay alive. The two remain the boat's sole passengers, drifting hungry and exposed for 227 days.

Pi recounts the harrowing journey but hidden in his account is an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of religion and writing, and the difference between truth and fiction. Pi realises he must learn to become the tiger's master, with the interaction between the two forming rich metaphors for spirituality and belief - to some extent, each of the (possibly imaginary) animals could represent a different facet of the hallucinating Pi. The underlying current of the book is that Pi must

## Identity



master his own dark Side, his fear, his despair, and desperation at his condition and the loss of his family. In a philosophical twist at the end after Richard Parker disappears and Pi is rescued, Pi placates doubting officials with a more credible version of his survival story. This is the version he is convinced they want to hear, and the reader is reminded yet again of how hard it is to tell whether a story is true.