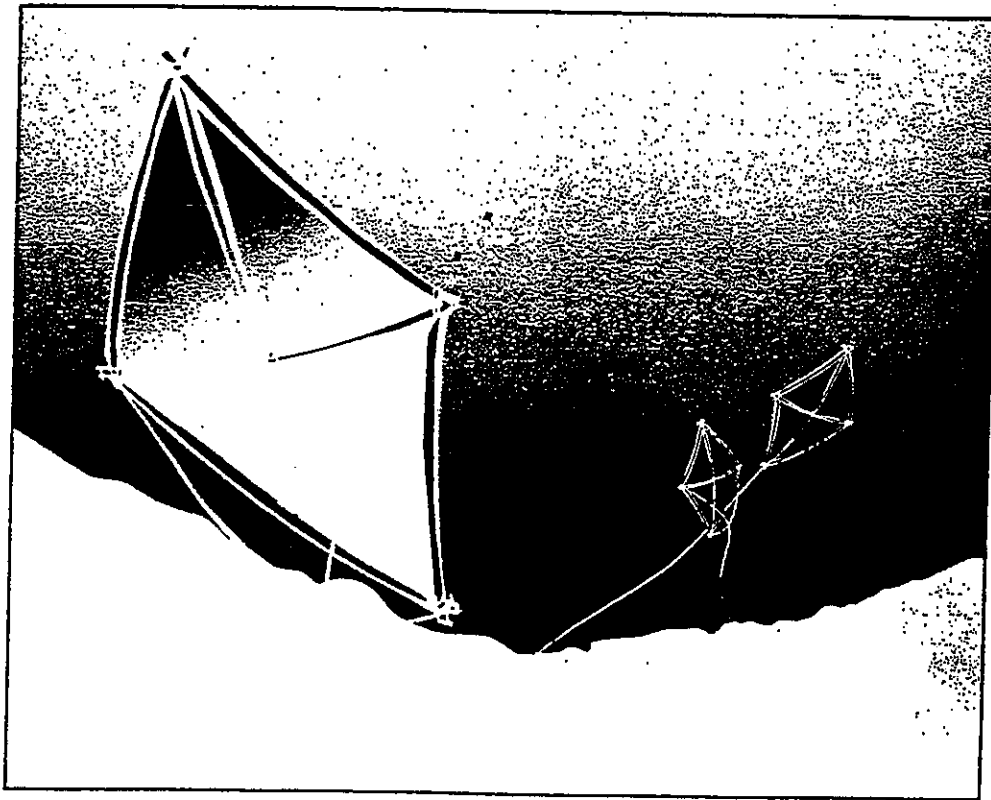


# *The Kite Runner*

## Activity Packet



# Introduction

After the decimation of the World Trade Center by terrorists on September 11, 2001, Afghanistan, a country associated with terrorists, came under fire for threatening America's national security. Very few Americans knew much, if anything, about Afghanistan. Many assumed it was part of the Middle East and populated by Arabs. In fact, Afghanistan is part of central Asia, bordered on the north by former Soviet republics, on the east by Iran, on the south and west by Pakistan and China. Afghans, the people of Afghanistan, are multiethnic and generally not Arab, as these lessons will show.

Although the American-sponsored "War on Terror" has defined Afghanistan as a domicile for our enemies, it is important to remember that the United States supported Afghan rebels (the mujahedin) in their fight against the Soviet invasion in 1979. Ironically, a country once defined by the U.S. government as a victim of an oppressor is now cast as a destroyer of democracy, freedom, and innocent victims. Amidst the consternation following September 11, many Americans, along with the government, saw a bin Laden in every Arab, Persian, or Muslim they encountered.

The intention of this unit is to dispel a stereotypical notion of Afghan citizens and Muslims by trying to understand the culture and history of the Afghan people. It also reaches deeper by exploring the ways that males and females are defined within a culture, as well as how social class and race grasp every corner of our consciousness. Amir's central conflict in the novel stems from his inability to define himself within the rigid rules outlined by his culture. Amir feels intimidated by his father's size and prowess. He has little in common with his father: he doesn't enjoy sports, lacks Baba's aggressiveness, and enjoys writing and reading (hobbies of his deceased mother). Baba doesn't believe in God's power to help humans and denounces Muslim mullahs, but Amir doesn't know what religion means in his life. To further complicate Amir's sense of himself, his closest friend, Hassan, is also his servant; later in the novel, his love interest, Soraya, has a past that threatens to ruin her chance of marriage. Just like men, Afghan women have social roles that are clearly defined and limited.

All of these plot strands center on Amir's problem of self-definition, a universal problem. His struggle throughout the novel for self-understanding and acceptance is the timeless journey of a hero, parallel to Odysseus's quest for home. Although this unit looks closely at Afghanistan—its history, culture, geography, values, religion, ethnicity, and gender roles—it also focuses on the universal human search for identity and meaning. In this sense, Amir's inner conflict mirrors Afghanistan's conflict; both struggle with finding an identity amidst rampant social unrest and pressures from outside influences. The lessons show how every human's identity is meshed with cultural expectations and parental models. *The Kite Runner* offers students a glimpse into a foreign culture that has been vilified by our own ignorance, but it also illustrates the common themes of humanity: the desire to be loved and accepted by others as well as by ourselves.

## The Hazaras

**Directions:** Read the following information, and answer the questions.

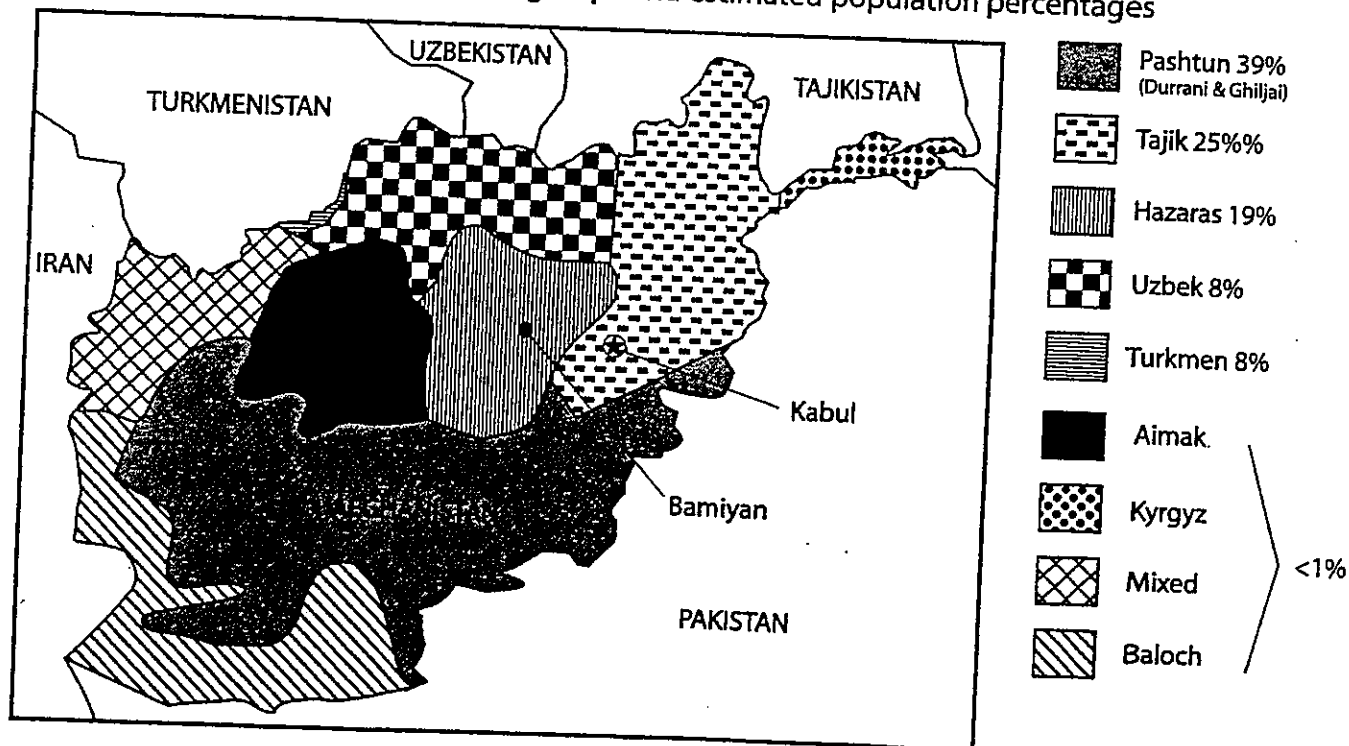
The Hazaras are one ethnic group among many in Afghanistan. The Hazaras constitute approximately 9 percent of the total population of Afghanistan. Other ethnic groups include the Pashtun (42 percent), the Tajik (27 percent), the Uzbek (9 percent) and the Turkmen (3 percent).<sup>1</sup> There are an estimated five million Hazaras throughout Central Asia, with the largest populations in Afghanistan and Iran. In Afghanistan, the majority of Hazaras live in mountainous central Afghanistan, and their homeland is called Hazarajat. Bamiyan, a city in central Afghanistan, is considered to be a historic Hazara cultural center.

The Hazaras are believed to be descendants of the Mongols who conquered present-day Afghanistan in the thirteenth century. Hazaras have physical features that distinguish them from the other ethnic groups. Most Hazaras are Shiite Muslim, making them a minority in the predominantly Sunni Afghanistan. Sunni and Shiite Muslims became two distinct groups after the death of Mohammed due to disagreement over who should lead the Muslim community. Today, approximately 85 percent of Muslims in the world are Sunni, and about 15 percent are Shi'a.

Throughout history, the Hazaras have been treated as an inferior ethnic group in Afghanistan. In the 1880s, under the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, a Pashtun ruler, Hazaras were persecuted by government troops. Hazaras were massacred, tortured, imprisoned, and enslaved. During the twentieth century, Hazaras continued to be enslaved and subjected to menial labor in the cities. Hazaras who do not live in cities have been pushed out to the most remote and least fertile areas of Afghanistan, causing isolation and poverty.

### Afghanistan's Hazara Minority

Breakdown of ethnic groups and estimated population percentages



<sup>1</sup>"Afghanistan," CIA World Factbook, <<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html/#People>> (14 August 2006).

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## Map of Afghanistan



Name \_\_\_\_\_

***The Kite Runner***  
Activity #1 • Prereading  
Use Before Reading  
(Locate Information/Predictions)

### Clue Search

**Directions:** Collect information about the book for each of the items. Write down the information, and then make some predictions about the book.

Information Source	Information Provided
Dedication	
Title	
Cover Illustration	
Teasers on the cover	
Friends' recommendations	
Reviewers' recommendations/awards won	

Your predictions about the book:

5

## Characters

**Amir:** narrator and protagonist of the story; a privileged child of the Pashtun upper class in Kabul, Afghanistan who often treats his servant and best friend, Hassan, with contempt; flees Afghanistan with his father after the Soviet invasion and starts a new life in California; is plagued by the guilt he feels for betraying Hassan

**Hassan:** caring, gentle son of Ali; serves as both servant and friend to Amir; devout Muslim; approaches life with a loving and forgiving attitude; loyal to Amir his whole life; marries Farzana and fathers Sohrab; murdered by the Taliban despite his unquestioning respect for Afghanistan's class divisions

**Baba:** Amir and (secretly) Hassan's father; well-liked and admired in the Afghan community, for which he does many good and charitable works; Amir's idol; remains aloof to Amir during his childhood; wracked with guilt for dishonoring Ali; leaves behind his life as a wealthy businessman in Afghanistan and takes a menial job in the United States

**Ali:** loyal Hazara servant who is part of Baba's family for 40 years and is like a brother to him; loving father to Hassan; ridiculed by Pashtun boys due to his appearance; killed by a land mine

**Rahim Khan:** Baba's best friend and business partner; encourages Amir and understands his struggle to gain his father's approval; knows about Amir's betrayal of Hassan and offers him a chance to be good again by getting Hassan's son out of Afghanistan

**Assef:** antagonist; sociopathic, cruel Pashtun boy who bullies other boys in Kabul, including Amir and Hassan; beats and ~~harms~~ Hassan; admires and wants to emulate Hitler; becomes a high-ranking Talib in Afghanistan, using his power to prey on others, especially Hazaras

**Sohrab:** Hassan's orphaned son whom Assef takes to live like ; tries to commit suicide when existing trauma and Amir's unintentional betrayal are too much for him to bear; eventually shows promise of recovery after Amir brings him to the United States

**Soraya:** Amir's wife; also suffers from a "sin" in her past, i.e., running away with a man when she was 18; kind and compassionate; unable to have a child of her own and gladly accepts Sohrab

**Sanaubar:** Hassan's beautiful but unscrupulous mother who deserted him five days after he was born; taken in and cared for by Hassan when she returns years later

**Sofia Akrami:** Amir's lovely, educated mother who died giving birth to him

**Mahmood and Tanya:** Assef's parents; intimidated by their son and cater to his wishes

**General Iqbal Taheri:** Soraya's father; worked for the Ministry of Defense; Baba's friend who respects Amir; proud, mercurial, and controlling; suffers from migraines

**Jamila Taheri:** Soraya's mother; feels unappreciated by the general; has a beautiful voice but is forbidden to sing by the general; adores Amir, especially since he is willing to listen to her troubles

**Farid:** driver who takes Amir into Afghanistan in search of Sohrab; initially has no empathy for Amir but comes to respect him; takes care of Sohrab and provides support as Amir recovers from severe injuries

**Wahid:** Farid's brother; gives Amir a place to stay when he returns to Afghanistan and feeds Amir though his family has little food; calls Amir "a true Afghan"

**Zaman:** runs the orphanage where Sohrab is placed after his parents' deaths; periodically sells a child to keep his orphanage running

**Raymond Andrews:** seemingly uncaring official at the American embassy in Islamabad

**Omar Faisal:** affable lawyer who tries to find a way for Amir to take Sohrab to the United States

**Kaka Sharif:** Soraya's uncle; works for INS; instrumental in getting a humanitarian visa for Sohrab

## Background Information

The following information will enhance the students' understanding of the novel.

1. Time line of key dates in Afghanistan's history: July 17, 1973—Daoud Khan, in a bloodless coup, deposed King Zahir Shah's regime and became president of the Republic of Afghanistan; 1979–1980—Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and installed a puppet government, which sparked opposition by freedom fighters known as *mujahideen*; 1988–1989—Soviet troops withdrew; 1992—The *mujahideen* removed Mohammad Najibullah's Soviet-backed government; 1993—Rival factions chose Burhanuddin Rabbani to be the new president, and Afghanistan descended into lawlessness; 1996—The Taliban, led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, seized control of Kabul, began enforcing a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, exiled President Rabbani, and offered protection to Osama bin Laden; 1999—The Taliban took control of Mazar-i-Sharif, and many Shi'a, especially Hazaras, were killed; September 11, 2001—Terrorists, under bin Laden's leadership, attacked the United States; December 2001—The United States and its allies helped Afghan rebels force the Taliban from power; 2002—Hamid Karzai became president of Afghanistan, and the U.S. placed about 12,000 troops in Afghanistan.  
Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/taliban-time.html> (active at time of publication)
2. Muslims/Islam religion: founded by the Prophet Mohammed in the seventh century; two branches now exist—the Sunni (about 90% of the Muslim world) and the Shi'a. The groups diverged in 632 due to disagreement over who should lead the Muslim community following Mohammed's death. Violent opposition between the two factions continues.
3. Hazaras: Afghan ethnic group considered to be lower class; speak Farsi and are mostly Shi'a Muslims
4. Pashtuns: Afghan ethnic group considered to be upper class; speak Pashto and are mostly Sunni Muslims
5. Urdus and Tajiks: other ethnic groups in Afghanistan
6. Farsi: language spoken primarily in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan
7. Taliban, a.k.a. Students of Islamic Knowledge Movement: one of the *mujahideen* groups formed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; ruled the country from 1996 until 2001, during which they instituted rampant public executions and other extreme punishments, banned "frivolous" activities, banned women from working outside the home, and forbade girls to go to school
8. Northern Alliance: Afghan rebel group that controlled Kabul between 1992 and 1996





## Amir's Inner Turmoil

### Part A.

**Directions:** Answer the following questions about the rape scene in chapter 7 of *The Kite Runner*.

1. What is the significance of the memories Amir recalls as he witnesses Hassan's rape? What do they suggest about his feelings or thoughts?
2. What is the significance of the dream Amir recalls as he witnesses the rape? What does it suggest about his feelings or thoughts?
3. How does the sheep serve as a symbol in this chapter? Why does Amir recall the sheep's slaughter during the rape?

**Part B.**

**Directions:** Decide which statement best explains why Amir does not try to stop Hassan's rape. Find evidence from the novel to support your answer. Be prepared to defend your choice.

1. Amir fears Assef's violence will be turned against himself if he intervenes.
2. Amir wants the kite to please Baba and win his affection. If he intervenes, Assef will take the kite.
3. Amir thinks that, as a servant and a Hazara, Hassan is less worthy than himself.

## The Scapegoat

**Directions:** Read the following description of the nature of a scapegoat. Then answer the questions.

A scapegoat, according to the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament of the Bible, is a goat that is sent into the wilderness to symbolically carry away the sins of the Israelites. In the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus Christ is seen as a scapegoat because he takes away humanity's sins by dying on the cross.

The scapegoat, in modern society, has more than just a religious reference. The scapegoat is used to describe a person or group that is blamed for the misfortunes of others. This person, like the scapegoats from the Bible, is an innocent person that is blamed for social problems. Some examples are given below.

- In the Salem Witch Trials, in Salem, Massachusetts, people were accused of being witches (loyal to the devil) even though many had not done anything immoral. Sometimes, people who were strange or who did not conform to society's rules or morals were accused of being witches. In this context, people accused of witchcraft were used as scapegoats upon which others put their fears of the unknown. When the scapegoat was killed or cast out of society, those who remained felt as if they had been cleansed of the sin or evil that the scapegoat represented.
- Adolf Hitler used the Jews as a scapegoat for the problems Germany was facing. As a result, Hitler and the Nazi party rationalized the mass murder of the Jews.
- Joseph McCarthy, a U.S. senator in the 1950s, used innocent people as scapegoats to justify the public's fear that communism might take over democracy.
- After the terrorist attacks on Washington, D.C., and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, many people who looked Middle Eastern were seen as guilty even though they had done nothing wrong. These people were scapegoats who were blamed for the evils of a few radical individuals from the Middle East. This act of blaming a person for another person's behavior based on the same racial or ethnic group is often called guilt by association.

1. What do you know about the biblical background of the scapegoat?

2. In what sense is Hassan a scapegoat?

Source: "Scapegoat," *Wikipedia*, 2 May 2006, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scapegoat>> (10 May 2006).

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## Adapting to America

**Directions:** Explore the changes in Baba and Amir as they adapt to American society. Refer to chapters 11 and 12 in the novel to gather support for your answers.

1. Analyze the scene in chapter 11 where Baba fights with the Nguyens in their store. What does this scene show about Baba's character? Select specific words from the text to support your response.
2. Why does Baba come to America? Explain your answer by using specific quotations from the text.
3. Why does Amir have an easier time adapting to American culture than Baba does?
4. Does Soraya help Amir develop as a character? Why or why not?

## The Father-Son Bond

### Part A.

**Directions:** Complete the chart below to analyze how the relationship between Amir and Baba changes due to their immigration to America. Find specific quotations and examples for each character from before and after their immigration. Then determine what those quotations suggest about the changes in each character.

Character	Before Immigration	After Immigration	Changes
Baba			
Amir			

**Part B.**

**Directions:** Based on the changes that you identified in part A, consider how the changes in each character impact Baba and Amir's relationship. Answer the following questions.

1. Do Amir and Baba become emotionally closer after their immigration to America? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the relationship between Baba and Amir is more successful in America than in Afghanistan? Why or why not?

## Amir Takes Flight

### Part A.

**Directions:** Reread the last fourteen paragraphs of *The Kite Runner*, beginning with the sentence, "I looked down at Sohrab." In the chart, take notes about Khaled Hosseini's use of language. Then count the number of words in the paragraph and record it in the right-hand column. Notice that some of the paragraphs are only a few words in length.

Paragraph	Diction, Figures of Speech, and Imagery	Number of Words
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		



**Directions:** Use the chart to answer the following questions.

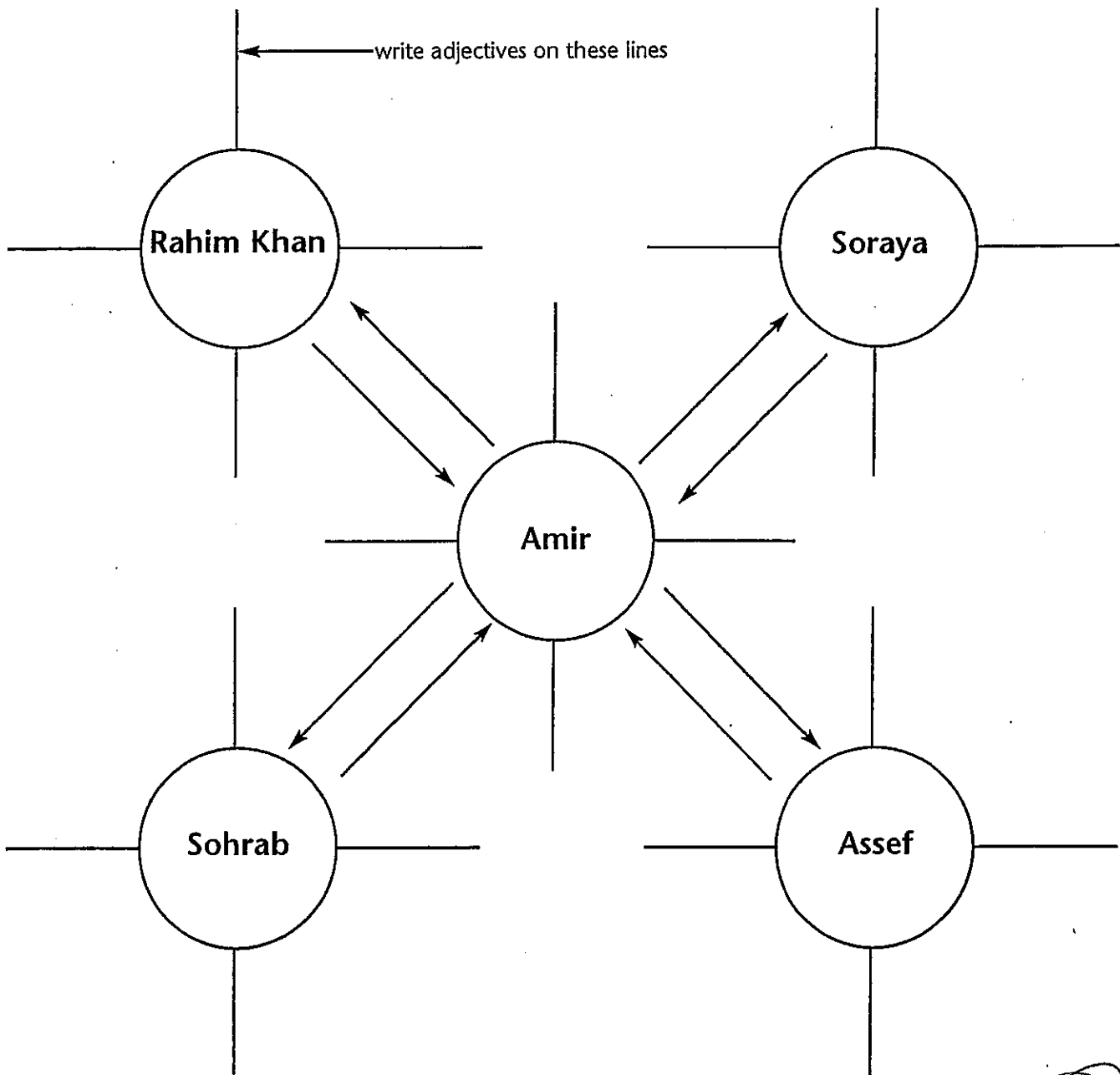
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

*The Kite Runner*  
Activity #9 • Character Analysis  
Use During and After Reading  
(Character Analysis)

### Sociogram

**Directions:** On the "spokes" surrounding each character's name, write several adjectives that describe that character. How does one character influence another? On the arrows joining one character to another, write a description of the relationship between the two characters. Remember, relationships go both ways, so each line requires a descriptive word.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

*The Kite Runner*  
Activity #8 • Comprehension  
Use During and After Reading  
(Conflict/Resolution)

## Solving Problems

**Directions:** List six problems the characters in the novel face. Then complete the rest of the chart. For each problem, circle which solution you think is best—yours or the character's.

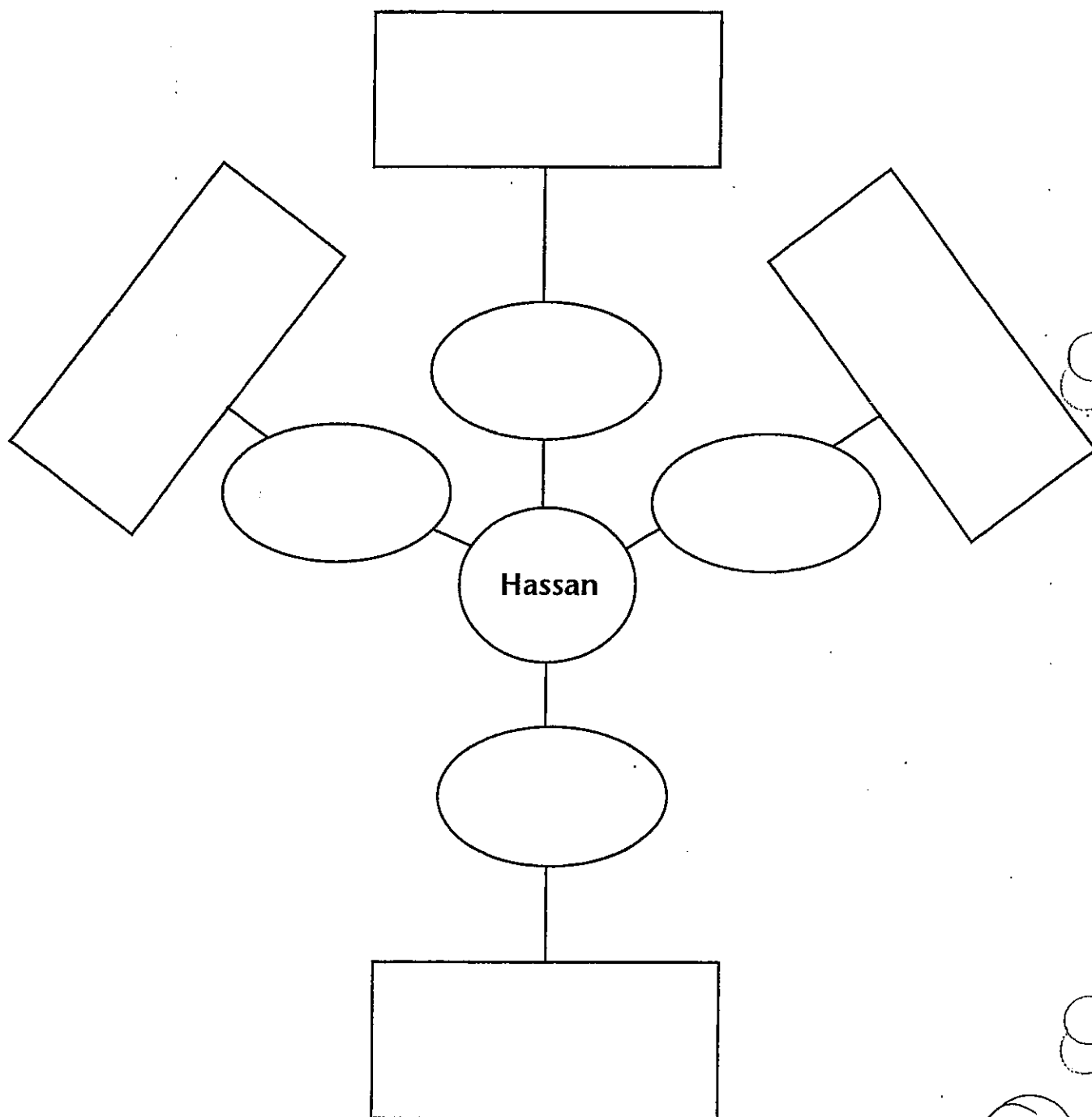
Problem	Character's Solution	Your Solution

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*The Kite Runner*  
Activity #12 • Character Analysis  
Use During and After Read  
(Character Analysis)

### Characterization

**Directions:** In the top three bubbles above his name, write words that describe Hassan as a child. List details from the story that demonstrate each quality in the rectangles. In the bubble below his name, write a word or two that describe what Amir discovers about Hassan as an adult. List details in the rectangle that support your description.



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