English 20-1

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

Assignments: Responses to various chapters

Pre-reading—Critical or creative writing/activity
Chapter 1—Critical Writing
Chapter 2—Personal Writing
Chapter 3—Critical Writing
Chapter 4—Creative and Critical Writing
Chapter 5—Analytical Writing
Chapter 6—Critical Writing
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The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
Writing Assignments

The Kite Runner, Pre-reading
Critical or Creative Writing/Activity

Before we've read one sentence of Hosseini's novel, we can pretty safely guess that it'll have something to do with kites—kites being important in the narrative's action, probably—important, almost certainly, in terms of symbolism.

In a well-developed critical-voice paragraph, discuss the metaphoric values of a kite. What is it about a kite—its construction, its appearance, its function, its action, its whatever—that makes it somehow a suitable symbol for human experience?

OR

Compose a story or a poem that significantly incorporates a kite (or kites) and that strongly reveals ideas about the deeper meanings of *kite*.

OR

Make a kite, for heaven's sake—a working one or decorative, realistic or stylized, three-dimensional or two, whatever. Be prepared to speak to the class about its metaphoric implications.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 1
Critical Writing

In a well-developed paragraph, discuss the functions and appeals of the novel's first chapter. How does this brief opener serve to draw the reader into the narrative that will follow?

In your response, you might comment on such elements as prose style, imagery, juxtapositions, structure, and suspense.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 2
Personal Writing

Early in the novel's exposition, Amir establishes the disparity between himself and his friend, Hassan. He speaks of differences in their socio-economic status, their religious and ethnic backgrounds, and their temperaments. Despite these differences, however, the two appear to be fast friends.

In a personal response of about 500 words (more if you wish), address the following task.

Consider your own friendships. Do you have (or have you had) a friend whom you would describe as being (or having been) in disparity with you in any significant ways? How does (or did) disparity affect your friendship? And how does your history with this person affect your understanding of human relationships generally?

The Kite Runner, Chapter 3
Critical Writing

As readers we often find that a given text is illuminated when we consider it in relation to other texts, works that advance similar ideas, use similar images, depict similar characters, or are conveyed in similar styles. Two works that came to my mind while reading Chapter 3 of *The Kite Runner* for the first time were "Envy," a poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and "Specifications for a Hero," an excerpt from Wallace Stegner's memoir *Wolf Willow.*

Read these two other short works. Then in a brief critical-response essay (about three paragraphs) **discuss the connections between the three texts, especially in matters of action, character, and theme.**

Envy
Yevgeny Yevtushenko
Translated by George Reavy

I envy.
This secret
I have not revealed before.
I know
there is somewhere a boy
whom I greatly envy.
I envy
the way he fights;
I myself was never so guileless and bold.
I envy
the way he laughs—
as a boy I could never laugh like that.
He always walks about with bumps and bruises;
I've always been better combed,
intact.
He will not miss
all those passages in books
I've missed.
Here he is stronger too.
He will be more blunt and harshly honest,
forgiving no evil even if it does some good;
and where I'd dropped my pen:
"It isn't worth it …"
he'd assert:
"It's worth it!"
and pick up the pen.
If he can't unravel a knot,
he'll cut it through,
where I can neither unravel a knot,
nor cut it through.
Once he falls in love,
he won't fall out of it,
while I keep falling in
and out of love.
I'll hide my envy.
Start to smile.
I'll pretend to be a simple soul:
"Someone has to smile;
someone has to live in a different way …"
But much as I tried to persuade myself of this,
Repeating,
"To each man his fate …"
I can't forget there is somewhere a boy
who will achieve far more than I.

Specifications for a Hero
Wallace Stegner

I remember one Victoria Day when there was a baseball game between our town and Shaunavon. Alfie Carpenter, from a river-bottom ranch just west of town, was catching for the Whitemud team. He was a boy who had abused me and my kind for years, shoving us off the foot-bridge, tripping us unexpectedly, giving us the hip, breaking up our hideouts in the brush, stampeding the town herd that was in our charge, and generally making himself loveable. This day I looked up from something just in time to see the batter swing and a foul tip catch Alfie full in the face. For a second he stayed bent over with a hand over his mouth. I saw the blood start in a quick stream through his fingers. My feelings were badly mixed, for I had dreamed often enough of doing just that to Alfie Carpenter's face, but I was somewhat squeamish about human pain and I couldn't enjoy seeing the dream come true. Moreover, I knew with a cold certainty that the ball had hit Alfie at least four times as hard as I had ever imagined hitting him, and there he stood, still on his feet and obviously conscious. A couple of players came up and took his arms, but he shook them off, straightened up, spat out a splatter of blood and teeth, and picked up his mitt as if to go on with the game. Of course they would not let him—*but what a gesture!* said my envious and appalled soul. There was a two-tooth hole when Alfie said something. He freed his elbows and swaggered to the side of the field. Watching him, my father broke out in a short, incredulous laugh. "Tough kid!" he said to the man next, and the tone of his voice goose-pimpled me like a breeze on a sweaty skin, for in all my life he had never spoken either to or of me in that voice of approval. Alfie Carpenter, with his broken nose and bloody mouth, was a boy I hated and feared, but most of all I envied his competence to be what his masculine and semi-barbarous world said a man should be.

As for me, I was a cry-baby. My circulation was poor and my hands always got blue and white in the cold. I always had a runny nose. I was skinny and small, so that my mother anxiously doctored me with Scott's Emulsion, sulphur and molasses, calomel, and other doses. To compound my frail health, I was always getting hurt. Once I lost both big-toe nails in the same week, and from characteristically incompatible causes. The first one turned black and came off because I had accidentally shot myself through the big toe with a .22 short[1]; the second because, sickly thing that I was, I had dropped a ten-pound bottle of Scott's Emulsion on it.

I grew up hating my weakness and despising my cowardice and trying to pretend that neither existed. The usual result of that kind of condition is bragging. I bragged, and sometimes I got called.[2] Once in Sunday school I said that I was not afraid to jump off the high diving board that the editor of the *Leader* had projected out over the highest cut-bank. The editor, who had been a soldier and a hero, was the only person in town who dared use it. It did not matter that the boys who called my bluff would not have dared to jump off it themselves. *I* was the one who had bragged, and so after Sunday school I found myself out on that thing, a mile above the water, with the wind cold around my knees. The tea-brown whirlpools went spinning slowly around the deep water of the bend, looking as impossible to jump into as if they had been whorls in cement. A half dozen times I sucked in my breath and grabbed my courage with both hands and inched out to the burlap pad on the end of the board. Every time, the vibrations of the board started such sympathetic vibrations in my knees that I had to creep back for fear of falling off. The crowd on the bank got scornful and then ribald,[3] and then insulting. I could not rouse even the courage to answer back, but went on creeping out, quaking back, creeping out again, until they finally all got tired and left for their Sunday dinners. Then at once I walked out to the end and jumped.

I think I must have come down through thirty or forty feet of air, bent over toward the water, with my eyes out on stems like a lobster's, and I hit the water just so, with my face and chest, a tremendous belly flopper that drove my eyes out through the back of my head and flattened me out on the water to the thickness of an oil film. The air was full of colored lights. I came to, enough to realize I was strangling on weed-tasting river water, and moved my arms and legs feebly toward the shore. About four hours and twenty deaths later, I grounded on the mud and lay there gasping and retching, sick for the hero I was not, for the humiliation I had endured, for the mess I had made of the jump when I finally made it—even the fact that no one had been around to see me, and that I would never be able to convince any of them that I really had, at the risk of drowning, done what I had bragged I would do.

[1] **.22 short** = a type of bullet
[2] **sometimes I got called** = sometimes my bluff was challenged
[3] **ribald** = vulgar

The Kite Runner, Chapter 4
Creative and Critical Writing

On hearing Amir's first fully composed story, Hassan—delighted though he is by the tale—questions a plot hole, saying, "If I may ask, 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?" Amir is flummoxed by the question, having left unconsidered this seemingly obvious problem. But perhaps there isn't really a problem in Amir's narrative. Indeed, there may be a sound literary justification for having the story's protagonist kill his wife in order to shed the tears that pile up as pearls.

With this possibility in mind, then, imagine yourself a more refined and prepared version of Amir as an author and compose an answer to Amir's question. Explain to Hassan why your protagonist has to forego the onion and instead has to kill his wife.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 5
Analytical Writing

A.

Among the challenges a writer faces, one of the greatest is that of achieving coherence—a sense of smooth, logical flow. A novelist, for instance, must be able to effectively connect the dots throughout the whole of his or her narrative, throughout the chapter, the paragraph, the sentence, the single phrase. And one of the ways coherence is achieved is through the rhythmic alternation of scene and summary in apt measures. For an understanding of these concepts, you'll need to read the attached excerpt from the essay "The Art of Narrative."

Having read the excerpt, look now to Chapter 5 of *The Kite Runner* and draw up a list of the chapter's units of action (those blocks of narration and description that make up the "happenings" of the text)**, noting where each begins and ends.** (Remember that your assessment of where actions begin and end may be different from another reader's, and know that each of you is as "right" in your reading as your defense of it is articulated.) **For each unit of action, note whether it is a scene or a summary or a strictly descriptive passage. Note too the use of short passages that may be used to make transitions from unit to unit.**

B.

Another way a storyteller achieves coherence is through the planting of details at various points early in the narrative, then returning at later points to them. Sometimes these repeated elements are seen as motifs—significant repetitions of images or ideas that lend thematic weight to a story and that stand as unifying threads in the work. Sometimes the early establishment of a detail is needed simply to justify a later action. In Chapter 6 of *The Kite Runner,* for example, Hassan's successful thwarting of Assef's would-be assault by threatening the bully with a slingshot is justified by earlier references to Hassan's skill with that weapon. We've been told about it, and presumably Assef knows too that Hassan has that skill. The action of the scene, then, appears to be motivated and credible. That is to say, it does not come at us "out of the blue" and therefore doesn't torture coherence.

Go back to Chapter 5 now and make a list of as many details as you can for which earlier references have been established.

A truncated excerpt from "The Art of Narrative"

The scene and the summary have quite distinct uses, distinct parts to play, in fiction. The use of the summary is well explained by Fielding in *Tom Jones:*

> We intend in it [the novel] rather to pursue the method of those writers who profess to disclose the revolutions of countries, than to imitate the painful and voluminous historian, who, to preserve the regularity of his series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much paper with the details of months and years in which nothing remarkable happened, as he employs upon those notable eras when the greatest scenes have been transacted on the human stage. Such histories as these do in reality very much resemble a newspaper, which consists of just the same number of words, whether there be any news in it or not …
>
> Now it is our purpose in the ensuing pages to pursue a contrary method. When any extraordinary scene presents itself—as we trust will often be the case—we shall spare no pains nor paper to open it at large to our reader. But if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy of his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history, but shall hasten on to matters of consequence.
>
> Book II, Chapter 1

> Good writers will, indeed, do well to imitate the ingenious traveler … who always proportions his stay at any place to the beauties, elegances, and curiosities which it affords.
>
> Book XI, Chapter 4

That is to say, when the novelist requires to traverse rapidly large tracts of the world of the novel that are necessary to the story but not worth dwelling long on—not worth narrating in specific detail of the scene—the summary is what he uses. For example:

> We lived in an uninterrupted course of ease and content for five years.
>
> Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*

> They traveled as long and expeditiously as possible and, sleeping one night on the road, reached Longbourn by dinner-time the next day.
>
> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

> In the course of the day I was enrolled a member of the fourth class, and regular tasks and occupations were assigned me.
>
> Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

> Mr. Dick and I soon became the best of friends. In less than a fortnight I was quite at home and happy among my new companions.
>
> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

> She had been led through the best galleries, had been taken to the chief points of view, had been shown the grandest ruins and the most glorious churches.
>
> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

> Sir Francis' career had not come up to his expectations.
>
> Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*

> Mary spent her first week in London quietly. She visited a few shops, but for the most part she stayed in her rooms and read or thought of John. At the end of the week she wanted action. She ordered herself a plum-colored habit and hired a horse and a groom to ride with her in the park.
>
> Storm Jameson, *The Lovely Ship*

Note how in the last passage the summary goes down the sliding scale of specificity toward the scene. The first two sentences are highly condensed summary, the third less so, and in the fourth sentence we receive such specifics as the color of the habit and the ordering of a horse and groom. The sentence that follows it begins, "The morning of her first ride was cold"—a specific time is established, and we glide off into a scene, where Mary rides in the park, has her horse disturbed by a hat scudding between its feet, receives the apologies of the young man who owns the hat, and so on.

The summary is useful too when a whole way of life is to be indicated as a background to the main characters' specific activities. There are some fine passages of summary of this kind in Thackeray's chapter

"How to Live Well on Nothing a Year" in *Vanity Fair*. To have related all the activities summarized there in specific action would occupy much more space and labor than they are worth to the story …

One of the most important and frequent uses of the summary is to convey rapidly a stretch of *past* life. The novelist, having excited our interest in his characters by telling a scene or two to us, suddenly whizzes his pageant back, then forward, giving us a rapid summary of their history, a flashback (and note that the flashback may take the form of a summary or a scene) … Trollope's flashback summary of the tragic history of Mary's birth in *Dr. Thorne* is famous for its vitality and interest, though is somewhat overlong. An amusingly terse summary, of which the briefness makes for the bite, is Aldous Huxley's account of the intrigue between Walter Bidlake and Marjorie Carling, which occupies just eight lines of the first page of *Point-Counterpoint.*

If unskilfully handled, the summary can become tedious. "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" thinks Alice just before the White Rabbit runs by, in condemnation of the book her sister is reading, and novel readers of all degrees of intelligence and experience would support the statement implied in her rhetorical question. Long, close paragraphs are in themselves apt to dismay the less serious readers, but their instinct here is sound, for an excess of summary and too little scene in a novel makes a story seem remote, without bite, second-hand, not least of all because a summary tends to throw its events into the past even though these events are often meant to be seen as contemporaneous with the events shown in the present-moment scenes …

The transition from scene to summary is also a ticklish job. It can be done in the baldest, crudest way, as when Defoe in *Moll Flanders* breaks into summary in the middle of a scene by remarking, "Here he gave me a long history of his life, which indeed would make a very strange history and be infinitely diverting." or when George Eliot begins a chapter of flashback summary on Tertius Lydgate's career by announcing with equal frankness, "At present I have to make the new settler Lydgate better known to anyone interested in him" (*Middlemarch*). But other novelists, whether of the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century, show such subtly in making their transitions that a very pointed tool is needed to disentangle the interweavings. For instance, much of the vigor and readability of Dickens derives from his innumerable interweavings of scene and summary. His general method is to keep summary to a minimum, a mere sentence or two here and there between the fertile burgeoning of his scenes. Thus the fabric of his narrative always stays closely woven …

It will not be necessary to furnish many examples of scenes from fiction, since the whole weight of fiction criticism hitherto seems directed at nothing else. Here are a few short examples:

> Upon opening the clothes, to his great surprise he beheld an infant wrapped up in some coarse linen, in a sweet and profound slumber, between his sheets.
>
> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*

> Mr. Darcy smiled, but Elizabeth thought she could perceive that he was rather offended and therefore checked her laugh.
>
> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

> All at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered and, on regaining my equilibrium, retired back a step or two from his chair.
>
> Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

> Mrs. Durrant sat in the drawing room by a lamp winding a ball of wool. Mr. Clutterbuck read the *Times.* In the distance stood a second lamp, and round it sat the young ladies, flashing scissors. Mr. Wortley read a book.
>
> "Yes, he is perfectly right," said Mrs. Durrant, drawing herself up and ceasing to wind her wool.
>
> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*

In all the above passages, specific actions are narrated. The characters see, speak, strike, totter, and cease to wind wool. An infant slumbers. Scissors flash.

The scene gives the reader a feeling of participating in the action intensely, for he is hearing about it at the moment it has occurred. The only interval between its occurring and the reader's hearing about it is that occupied by the novelist's voice telling it. The scene is therefore used for intense moments. The climax of a sequence of actions is always (by novelists who know their craft) narrated in scene. When Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, when Rochester's wedding to Jane is interrupted, when Micawber reveals Uriah Heep's wickedness—when an important action occurs, when an important decision is made—it is presented in scene …

It is not possible to convey the same volume of information in a scene as in a summary of the same length, but by a highly significant or symbolic scene an equally valid impression of the portion of life being presented may be created—some would say a *more* valid, a *more* vivid, impression …

The scene method alone cannot give an extensive background, cannot give a long stretch of past history, cannot give explanations. At least it cannot do so except by using a great number of scenes, thus wasting the reader's time and attention and throwing the story out of proportion. Percy Lubbock makes the interesting point that in *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy destroys one of finest effects by not using summary sufficiently. Anna renounces her world for love—but Tolstoy does not give us a panorama of her glittering social world through summary. Rather, he uses scenes alone.

The proper use, the right mingling, of scene, description, and summary is the art of narrative.

It is difficult to give many examples without overweighting this text with slabs of quotation involving whole pages of fiction, so perhaps I may be allowed to give the text of one brief passage only, to illustrate the method of analysis, and then to analyze the opening pages of *Vanity Fair,* as an example to serve as typical of many.

Description:	The moon was set, and it was very dark.
Scene:	Bessie carried a lantern whose light glanced on wet steps and gravel road …
Description:	Raw and chill was the winter morning.
Scene:	My teeth chattered as I hastened down the drive … The distant roll of the wheels announced the coming coach. I went to the door and watched its lamps approach rapidly through the gloom … The coach drew up … My trunk was hoisted up; I was taken from Bessie's neck, to which I clung with kisses. "Be sure and take good care of her!" cried she to the guard. "Ay, ay!" was the answer. The door was slapped to, and on we drove.
Summary:	We appeared to travel over hundreds of miles …We passed through several towns,
Scene:	and in one, a very large one, the coach stopped, the horses were taken out, and the passengers alighted to dine. I was carried into an inn …

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

The close interweaving of the types of narrative in this short passage may be noted as typical.

Let us now analyze a more extended piece from a master hand. *Vanity Fair* opens thus:

> While the present century was in its teens and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's Academy for Young Ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach.

"There drove up … a large family coach." Here we witness a specific action at a specific time in a specific place—that is, a scene. The scene continues for three or four pages. Miss Jemima Pinkerton sees the coach and comments on it to her sister. They talk, and in their talk it transpires that Amelia Sedley is leaving the academy that day and that another pupil, Becky Sharp, is accompanying her. Miss Pinkerton inscribes a farewell copy of Johnson's Dictionary for Amelia, but declines Jemima's request to inscribe one for Becky Sharp. Then Thackeray glides off into a mingled summary and description, telling us what Amelia was like and giving us certain passages of her history. Then we hear, "The hour of parting came." Miss Pinkerton and Amelia part (summary moving into the specific). Miss Pinkerton and Becky part (definitely scene, as Becky makes her farewells in French, which her schoolmistress does not understand). There is a rapid

account of the parting with the pupils. The two girls enter Amelia's coach (scene). Jemima hands in some sandwiches and a copy of the dictionary for Becky, though un-inscribed (scene). Becky throws the dictionary out the window (scene). The carriage rolls away and the gates are closed (scene), and the chapter is over.

Chapter 2 begins with a scene between Amelia and Becky in the coach. Then Thackeray goes into a four-page flashback, chiefly summary mingled with a short scene here and there, telling us of Becky's past.

> Many a dun had she talked to and turned away from her father's door. Many a tradesman had she coaxed and wheedled into good humor … The rigid formality of the place suffocated her … She had not been much of a dissembler, until now her loneliness taught her to feign …

Then, when Thackeray has finished summarizing Becky's past, he slips into scene.

> When at length home was reached, Miss Amelia Sedley skipped out on Sambo's arm … She allowed Rebecca over every room in the house … She insisted upon Rebecca accepting the white cornelian … she determined in her heart to ask her mother's permission to present her white Cashmere shawl to her friend.

The white Cashmere shawl has been brought home from India by Amelia's brother Joseph, and the scene continues and becomes even more specific as Amelia and Sedley talk about Joseph. The dinner bell rings, the two girls go down to dinner (scene), and the chapter ends.

Chapter 3 begins with a scene between the girls and Joseph, then goes off into a flashback summary about Joseph Sedley.

> His bulk caused Joseph much anxious thought and alarm. Now and again he would make a desperate attempt to get rid of his super-abundant fat, but his indolence and love of good living speedily got the better of these endeavors at reform … He took the hugest pains to adorn his big person and passed many hours daily in that occupation.

If we were given an account of one specific occasion when Joseph at a specific time and place stood before his mirror dressing for hours, that would be a scene. But Thackeray rightly judges that the Collector of Boggley Wallah at his dressing table is not worth so long pausing over, so summarizes him instead in a page and a half …

The Kite Runner, Chapter 6
Critical Writing

Respond to the following two questions in the form of a well-developed critical-voice paragraph.

*** What details in Chapter 6 indicate Amir's faulty understanding of the nature of love?**
*** What factor(s) may be the cause of his immature conception of love?**

The Kite Runner, Chapter 7
Creative Writing

Following the horrific assault he has endured at the hands of Assef, Hassan return's to Baba's home and hands the hard-won trophy, the blue kite, to Amir. Amir has no idea what Hassan knows about the attack—whether Amir is aware or unaware of it—and we, therefore, have no idea either. But imagine that we do.

Indeed, imagine both possibilities: that Hassan knows and that Hassan doesn't know. Then compose two separate interior monologues for Hassan (about 200 words each—or more, if you wish—in either case)**:**

1) the thoughts that course through his mind as he returns, blue kite in hand, to Amir, knowing that Amir has witnessed the crime

AND

2) his thoughts as he returns, believing that no one else, least of all Amir, has witnessed the crime.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 8
Public-address Writing

Among the main effects of this novel, one is that it serves as an exploration of guilt—the experience of having wronged other people and of its consequences for both the guilty and the injured. Those of us who are not sociopaths know that when we have hurt others, our strongest desire is to atone. We want to confess our crimes and be cleansed. We want those we've injured to be restored. Amir *cannot* confess and atone, though of course he wants to. At one point in Chapter 8, he says aloud, "I watched Hassan get raped." However, he's in no one's hearing but his own. On reading this novel the first time, I fairly ached to hear him confess his fault openly, even though I knew it couldn't happen. At least, it couldn't happen right away. After all, if he were to confess this early in the narrative, the novel would have to take a much different turn or even have ended altogether.

But what if Amir *were* to confess now?

Picture yourself as Amir unable to be any longer the monster in the lake. Decide that you will confess the details of your crime. Decide that you will do whatever you must to atone, to make restitution. But—and here's the hard part—decide to confess publically. Make your profession not just to Hassan, Ali, and Baba, but to all of Kabul. How will you speak to an entire city made up friends, relatives, acquaintances, enemies, authorities, and total strangers? And how, by telling them of your own experience, will you encourage (this word is carefully chosen: to *put courage into*) them to do the right things in their lives too?

The Kite Runner, Chapter 9
Analytical Writing

Despite the great importance of its central action, Chapter 9 is somewhat tersely told. In your judgment, as a reader and critic, is this, the relative brevity of Chapter 9, an effective choice?

Choose a minimum of three passages from Chapter 9 that you can use to support an argument:

1) that the action is too suddenly, too minimally related and that Hosseini needs to have fleshed out the action and descriptive details more fully,

OR

2) that the suddenness and minimalism of the narration makes for an effective strategy.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 10
Critical Writing

Two strikingly ironic events occur in Chapter 10: first, the encounter between Baba and the young Russian soldier; then, the death of Kamal and his father's subsequent suicide.

In a well-developed critical-voice paragraph for each, discuss the ironies that invest these events.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 11
Creative Writing

The Kite Runner's style may be considered fairly straightforward. Hosseini's actions, descriptions, and reflections are conveyed in generally broad strokes. He does not dwell heavily on minute details or strongly emphasize the nuances, inconsistencies, and ambiguities of experience. Nor are his diction and syntax choices especially challenging. But this straightforwardness is the very quality that appeals to many readers—readers who seek an essential story, one that is honest and unembellished, a story that races to its conclusion or one in which they can participate imaginatively by filling in gaps that the author does not. Other readers, however, may feel short-changed by a lack of textural variety—arguing perhaps that, in order to deliver more powerful effects, the author needs to offer greater lyricism and rhythmic variety, that his descriptions need to be more metaphorically charged, his characters more pied and perplexing.

For the purpose of this assignment, take the latter position and take on the role of mentor for Khaled Hosseini. Do this by rewriting, for his instruction, one passage from Chapter 11 of *The Kite Runner* (about, say, 100 words)**. Show him how one *too* simple passage can be enriched and made more engaging for a mature and demanding reader. Keep the core meaning or purpose of the passage intact, but add to it or temper it in any way you wish for the sake of increasing its power.**

The Kite Runner, Chapter 12
Comic Writing

Soraya accepts Amir's proposal of marriage. Of course she does. Did we expect she wouldn't?

But what if she *couldn't?* What if she were wholly repulsed by the idea of being yoked to Amir?

Though you are in the thick of a serious work, take a moment for some comic relief. Imagine you are Soraya and work out how you might articulate to Amir—whether tactfully, bluntly, casually, caustically, matter-of-factly, diplomatically, or whateverally—a rejection of his proposal. Let your response take the form of a letter (as long or as short as you choose) **to Amir.**

As well, consider this: Lovers sometimes scent with perfume their letters to their lovers. Soraya certainly wouldn't scent the sending of a rejection with perfume. What odor might she use instead?

The Kite Runner, Chapter 13
Critical Writing

At the wedding of Amir and Soraya, the *ahesta boro,* the wedding song, is played.

> Make morning into a key and throw it into the well;
> Go slowly, lovely moon, go slowly.
> Let the morning sun forget to rise in the east;
> Go slowly, lovely moon, go slowly.

On his hearing it there, Amir recalls that he'd also heard it sung by an armed Russian soldier at a military checkpoint on the night that he and Baba fled Kabul. Here, then, we are invited to consider two sharply different contexts for the same lyric—one, the wedding, a time of festivity and sweetness; two, the checkpoint crossing, a moment of fear and bitterness. And in each case, the image of a slowly rising moon is appropriate in its way.

On *my* hearing it there, I recalled the poem "Ars Poetica," in which Archibald MacLeish also uses the image of a slowly rising moon, and to an effect different from either of the two glanced at above. Here's the poem:

> A poem should be palpable and mute
> As a globed fruit,
>
> Dumb
> As old medallions to the thumb,
>
> Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
> Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—
>
> A poem should be wordless
> As the flight of birds.
>
> *
>
> A poem should be motionless in time
> As the moon climbs,
>
> Leaving, as the moon releases
> Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,
>
> Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
> Memory by memory the mind—
>
> A poem should be motionless in time
> As the moon climbs.
>
> *
>
> A poem should be equal to:
> Not true.
>
> For all the history of grief
> An empty doorway and a maple leaf.
>
> For love
> The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—
>
> A poem should not mean
> But be.

With reference to its three appearances—Hosseini's use of it to complement the wedding, his use of it to complement also the checkpoint crossing, and MacLeish's use of it as a metaphor for the effect of a

good poem—discuss the image of the moon's rising slowly. If you'd rather approach this in terms of answering a question, consider this: ***How does the image of a slowly rising moon support action or idea in the text?***

Structure your response as you choose. If you have a good deal to say, you may need to break this discussion into more than one paragraph. If your observations are straightforward and don't want for embellishing, a single paragraph may be enough.

The Kite Runner, Chapter 14
Critical Writing

Chapter 14 is another brief chapter, a chapter whose function is mainly to make a transition from one of the novel's significant cluster of actions into the next. But this chapter also includes a slice of narration and commentary regarding Soraya's parents, material that might seem almost extraneous—that is, if the writer's real purpose *is* simply to provide a transition. But little in *The Kite Runner* can really be dismissed as extraneous, and this diversion concerning Soraya's parents *does* have its values.

In a brief critical response (a well-developed paragraph) comment on the effects of this inclusion—i.e. from "Two years earlier, the general had broken his right hip" to "Sometimes he even took notes."

The Kite Runner, Chapter 15
Descriptive Writing

An image, strictly speaking, refers to something seen. But in discussions of literature, the term *imagery* can cover any passage that stands as an appeal to any bodily sense. The critic, then, may speak of the following categories of imagery:

visual—of sight
aural—of sound
olfactory—of smell
gustatory—of taste
tactile—of touch
thermal—of temperature
kinetic or **kinesthetic**—of movement

Imagery, of course, is what makes a work palpable, brings the writer's meaning down out of the rare air of abstraction and sets it concretely in our senses where we can know it in the body, which, as it happens, is where most of us live most of the time. Note, for example, in the following passage by Dylan Thomas, in which he describes a spring morning in London, that for whatever else it may achieve lyrically or thematically, it takes us powerfully into another place, a place we can know in the body.

> It was a shooting green spring morning, nimble and crocus, with all the young women treading the metropolitan sward, swinging their milk-pail handbags, gentle, fickle, inviting, accessible, forgiving each robustly abandoned gesture of salutation before it was made or imagined, assenting, as they reveled demurely towards the manicure salon or the typewriter office, to all the ardent unspoken endearments of shaggy strangers and the winks and pipes of cloven-footed sandwich-men. The sun shrilled, the buses gamboled, policemen and daffodils bowed in the breeze that tasted of buttermilk. Delicate carousel plashed and babbled from the public houses which were not yet open. I felt like a young god. I removed my collar studs and opened my shirt. I tossed back my hair. There was an aviary in my heart, but without any owls or eagles. My cheeks were cherried warm. I smelt, I thought, of sea-pinks. To the sound of madrigals sung by slim sopranos in water-filled valleys where I was the only tenor, I leapt onto a bus. The bus was full. Carefree, open-collared, my eyes alight, my veins full of the spring as a dancer's shoes should be full of champagne, I stood, in love and at ease and always young, on the packed lower deck. And a man of exactly my own age—or perhaps he was a little older—got up and offered me his seat. He said, in a respectful voice, as though to an old justice of the peace, "Please, won't you take my seat?" and then he added "Sir."

If one of art's principal functions is to imitate life, then the body is a meaningful place for the artist to begin, for it is through the body first that we go about the process of *generating* meaning. Imagery, then, can create not just a setting; it can also convey mood, character, symbolism, and more. It can give us clues about how we are supposed to read certain pieces thematically. Consider, for instance, the following poem by W. B. Yeats, and note what Yeats would have us think about the idea of beauty drifting away "like the waters."

> I heard the old, old men say,
> "Everything alters,
> And one by one we drop away."
> They had hands like claws, and their knees
> Were twisted like the old thorn trees
> By the waters.
> I heard the old, old men say,
> "All that's beautiful drifts away
> Like the waters."

Here we might not be expected to think the same about the idea of beauty drifting away if it were not attributed to "old, old men" with hands like "claws" and knees like "old thorn trees."

Chapter 15 of *The Kite Runner,* which begins with Amir's arrival in Peshawar and leads into his reunion with Rahim Khan, opens with descriptions of complementary settings—the Peshawar of Amir's present experience and the Kabul of his childhood. To help us know these places, Hosseini develops rich

images of workaday city life, engaging our bodies' senses and thereby developing the idea of life's profusions and contradictions, an abstraction that informs not just Chapter 15 but the novel overall. Here are images of sweetness set against bitterness, chaos against order, decay against vitality.

Your task now is to compose a description, in about 300 words (or more, if you wish), of a setting that engages each of the body's senses, using imagery that includes visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, thermal, and kinetic faculties. It may be a setting familiar or unfamiliar to you, domestic or wild, real or fantastic, pleasant or unpleasant—whatever. And it must imply an idea—that is, a dominating conception about life. It may suggest an idea, for instance, about renewal or degeneration, about isolation or interconnection, about dilemma or certainty. It may suggest its speaker's main orientation to the world—say, his or her tendency to optimism or pessimism, to delight or despair, to curiosity and engagement or complacency and detachment. In other words, when your reader has finished your text, he should feel not only that he has been somewhere and known it in the body, but also that he can say, *Ah yes, this is what life is like.*