

Literacy in the kite runner

Literature, Russian Literature



774 million adults around the world are illiterate. In many places, people are not provided the opportunity to get education. In Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Amir is lucky enough to learn how to read and write, while many people in his country, including his servant, are illiterate. The power of literacy and the written word in the book is shown through Amir's power of education against Hassan, Amir's love of poetry and books from a young age, and the influence of Amir's stories in his relationships.

Amir uses the power of literacy against Hassan multiple times throughout the book. Hassan is his servant and best friend, and Hassan is incredibly loyal to Amir and does everything that Amir says. "What use did a servant have for the written word?" (15). It is a known fact that Hazaras are illiterate, and will always be illiterate. Hassan would be illiterate just like his father, and like every other Hazara in Afghanistan. Amir uses the fact that Hassan hasn't had the opportunities like him to get a proper education and learn how to read. When the two of them were young, Amir would read to Hassan under the pomegranate tree. "My favorite part of reading to Hassan was when we came across a big word that Hassan didn't know" (15). Amir used his advantage of literacy against Hassan, and exposed Hassan's ignorance. "I'll use it in a sentence for you. When it comes to words, Hassan is an imbecile" (15). Hassan, not knowing anything but loyalty to Amir, believes him. When Hassan grows up, he learns to read and write, and writes a letter to Amir. He makes a promise to himself that he will not let his son grow up illiterate like he had.

Amir develops a love for books from a young age. His mother was a poet and kept many books in her house. Amir discovers these books and reads

everything that he can. During the game of Sherjangi or “ Battle of the Poems,” Amir would win every round and be able to recite a verse from a poem by heart. “ One time, I took on the whole class and won” (10). After reading all of his mother’s books, Amir started going to the bookstore and getting as many new books as he could get his hands on. “ I bought one a week from the bookstore near Cinema Park, and stored them in cardboard boxes when I ran out of shelf room” (11). His father, however, disapproves of this. “ Real men didn’t read poetry – and god forbid that they ever write it!” (11). Although Baba married a poet, having only one son who wasn’t manly and liked to read was not what he wanted from a son.

Amir’s stories influence his relationships with other people. One of the most important examples of this is his relationship with Rahim Khan, his father’s business partner. While his father disapproves of his writing and reading, Rahim Khan is Amir’s biggest fan. When Amir started writing stories, Amir tried to give one of his stories to his father to read. His father didn’t show any interest in his son’s passion, and Rahim Khan was the one to save the day. “ May I have it, Amir jan? I would very much like to read it” (17). Since then, Amir’s writing was a big part of his relationship with Rahim Khan. For Amir’s birthday, Rahim Khan gave him a leather bound notebook for his stories. Rahim Khan understood Amir’s passion for the written word, and for this reason Rahim Khan was the father that Amir wished he could have had. Another relationship that is influenced heavily by Amir’s love for stories is his relationship with Soraya. The first time that Amir talks to Soraya, they talk about books. He asks what she is reading, a bold question to ask a woman in the middle of an Afghan market. She shows him the title of the book, and

they continue to talk about books and Amir's writing. This marks the beginning of their relationship, and within a few weeks, Amir brings her one of his stories. But, to the horror of both Soraya and Amir, General Taheri, Soraya's father, is standing right behind Amir (82). How Soraya and Amir's relationship stems from books and writing is important to what their relationship becomes. Soraya is very supportive of Amir's books. When Amir sent his first manuscript to book agencies, " Soraya kissed the carefully wrapped manuscript" (100). Books bring the two of them together, and are an important part of their relationship.

During the course of this novel, literacy and the written word proves to be a huge factor in Amir's life, including how he uses it against Hassan, how his love for it came to be, and how it affected his relationships. Firstly, Amir uses his education against Hassan's lack of it, even though Hassan is supportive of Amir's writing. Secondly, Amir fell in love with literature from a young age, with the help of his mother's books and the opportunity for education. Finally, Amir's passion for literature affects his relationships with many people in his life, but most importantly with Rahim Khan and his wife, Soraya.