

Book: A Thousand Splendid Suns

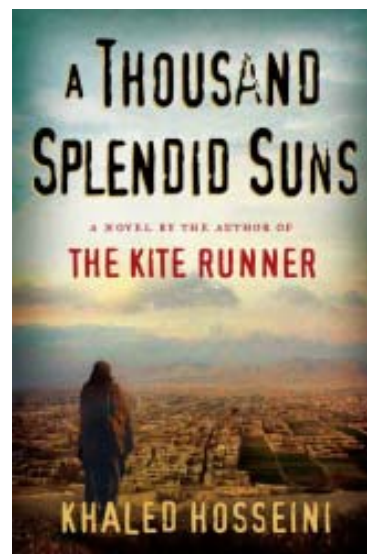
Author: Khaled Hosseini

Hardback: 384 pages

Publisher: Riverhead

Country setting: Afghanistan

Genre: Historical Novel



Catholic Social Teaching Principles and themes to explore through this book:

- The rights and dignity of women
- The impact of war on families
- Moral choices and decision-making
- The nature of hope in the midst of suffering
- The nature of love and its manifestations

Synopsis:

A Thousand Splendid Suns, by Khaled Hosseini, is a breathtaking story set against the volatile events of Afghanistan's last thirty years—from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to the post-Taliban rebuilding—that puts the violence, fear, hope, and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. It is a tale of two generations of characters brought jarringly together by the tragic sweep of war, where personal lives—the struggle to survive, raise a family, find happiness—are inextricable from the history playing out around them.

Propelled by the same storytelling instinct that made *The Kite Runner* a beloved classic, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is at once a remarkable chronicle of three decades of Afghan history and a deeply moving account of family and friendship. It is a striking, heart-wrenching novel of an unforgiving time, an unlikely friendship, and an indestructible love—a stunning accomplishment.

-Publisher's synopsis

Timeline: Afghanistan

- **1933** - Zahir Shah becomes king at age 19 and Afghanistan remains a monarchy for next four decades.
- **1964** - a constitutional monarchy is introduced - but leads to power struggles
- **1973** - Zahir Shah is deposed in a coup
- **1979** - Invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet Troops
- **1989** - Soviet troops leave, but civil war continues
- **1991** - US and USSR agree to end military aid to Afghanistan
- **1996** - Taliban seize control of Kabul - and introduce hardline Islam banning women from work, and introducing Islamic punishments, which include stoning to death and amputations
- **1997** - Taliban controls two thirds of country
- **2001** - U.S. and U.K. airstrikes begin after officials refuse to hand over Osama Bin Laden for involvement in 9/11 terrorist strike on World Trade Towers.
- **2006** - NATO military forces take over leadership of military operations
- **2007** - Military clashes on Afghan/Pakistan border escalate.

Source: BBC Country profile for Afghanistan - timeline
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/country_profiles/1162668.stm

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Afghanistan is a country of rich history, rugged beauty and cultural richness. This book brings into focus many paradoxes about this country. How did this story influence your own ideas and perceptions about the people and the place of Afghanistan?
2. Based on your reading of the book, how do cultural values, and cultural roles shape one's identity? In what ways can this be helpful? In what ways can this be harmful? How do you see this reflected in the characters in the story? How have you experienced it in your own life? What are some positive impacts? What are some of the negative impacts?
3. Babi tells Mariam at one point that she is a very bright girl and can be anything she wants to be. How does his message compare or contrast with the other prevailing cultural messages? Whose influence will prove greater? Her father's or the Taliban's? Why?
4. The Taliban bans some of the most essential cultural expressions that can uplift, educate, and transform. Why do think such outlets like music, art, dance, movies are banned? What is the intent? Will it succeed or fail in Afghanistan today?
5. This book weaves several fascinating strands of mother/daughter relationship together. What similarities and differences do you notice among the relationships? How do mother/daughter dynamics play out in other situations and other relationships? In what surprising ways do you find love's nurturing power revealed?
6. How have the suffering blows of war been mostly felt or absorbed by the women of the story? What parallel does the author draw between the abusive relationship of men in the lives of women? What about the failure of relationships of marital bonds, when the son's become not offspring but trophies or prized possessions? What form does this revelation take between Rasheed and Mariam? Rasheed and Laila? Babi and his wife?
7. A theme of self-sacrifice runs through the story. At times it is hope that impels such great self-sacrifice. Why is this a central theme? How do you see it revealed in various characters?
8. The absence of love has the same devastation on human life as the impact of war. Explain how this is evident in the character's lives. It seems to be the author's assertion through various story lines that only love and hope are more powerful than war and human violence. How so?



To Help the People of Afghanistan:

Catholic Relief Services in Afghanistan:

http://www.crs.org/our_work/where_we_work/overseas/asia/afghanistan/landing_index.cfm

To Learn More About Afghanistan:

CIA Factbook: Afghanistan

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

BBC Country profile: Afghanistan

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/country_profiles/1162668.stm

