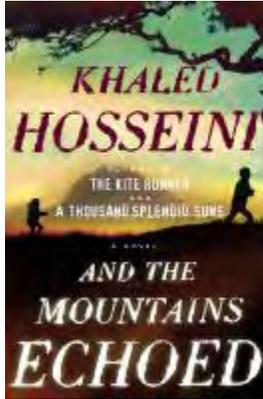


Oliver Wolcott Library  
And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini  
Book Discussion Guide  
By Caitlin Costa



#### **About the Book:**

It begins in 1952 in an Afghan village, with two motherless siblings three year-old Pari, and her ten year old older brother Abdullah. Abdullah is more of a mother than a brother to Pari and she is his entire world. One day while traveling with their father Saboor across the desert to Kabul, an event occurs that changes their lives forever. This tale revolves around not just parents and children but brothers and sisters, cousins and caretakers. Following Saboor, Abdullah and Pari and the twist and turns of their lives, and their choices: as they travel the globe—from Kabul to Paris to San Francisco to the Greek island of Tinos. Hosseini explores the many ways in which families nurture, wound, betray, honor, and sacrifice for one another. How often we are surprised by the actions of those closest to us, when it matters most.

*Source: Khaledhosseini.com*

#### **About the Author:**

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, and moved to the United States in 1980. His first novel, *The Kite Runner*, was an international bestseller, published in thirty-eight countries. In 2006 he was named a goodwill envoy to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. He lives in northern California.

*Source: Amazon.com*

## Book Reviews:

“Hosseini delves into the joys, sorrows, and betrayals that alternately bind and fracture families. Once again, Hosseini’s lovingly rendered Afghanistan takes center stage, but in this book he extends his examination to encompass how the Afghan identity affects his characters’ decisions and lives in unfamiliar environments.”—*Boston Globe*

“With his third and most ambitious novel yet, Hosseini makes it clear that he’s not ready to rest on his Big Name. . . . While it hits all the Hosseini sweet spots—nostalgia, devastating details, triumph over the odds—*And the Mountains Echoed* covers more ground, both geographically and emotionally, than his previous works. It’s not until Hosseini makes the novel small again, for the poignant conclusion, that you fully appreciate what he’s accomplished.” —*Entertainment Weekly (A)*

“[Hosseini’s] beautifully written, masterfully crafted new book, *And the Mountains Echoed*, spans nearly 60 years of Afghan history as it investigates the consequences of a desperate act that scars two young lives and resonates through many others. . . . *And the Mountains Echoed* is painfully sad but also radiant with love: the enduring bond of a brother and sister; the irritable but bedrock connection of cousins; the quiet intimacy of master and servant who become friends; the commitment of a doctor and nurse to war’s victims. To underscore love’s centrality and contingency, Hosseini closes with an image drawn from a dream: a snapshot of bygone happiness all the more precious in retrospect because we know how fragile it is.”—*Los Angeles Times*

“Like a sculptor working in a soft medium, [Hosseini] gently molds and shapes individual pieces that ultimately fit together in a major work. . . . Family matters in ways small and large in this novel. Whether or not the connections are visible, they exist nevertheless. Hosseini seems to be telling us that the way we care is who we are and, ultimately, the face we show to life.”—*New York Daily News*

## Discussion Questions:

1. *And the Mountains Echoed* introduces us to Saboor and his children Abdullah and Pari, and the shocking, heart breaking event that divides them. From there, the book branches off to include multiple other characters and storylines before circling back to Abdullah and Pari. How do each of the other characters relate back to the original story? What themes is the author exploring by having these stories counterpoint one another?

2. The novel begins with a tale of extraordinary sacrifice that has ramifications through generations of families. What do you think of Saboor's decision to let the adoption take place? How are Nila and Nabi implicated in Saboor's decision? What do you think of their motives? Who do you think is the most pure or best intended of the three adults? Ultimately, do you think Pari would have had a happier life if she had stayed with her birth family?

3. Think of other sacrifices that are made throughout the book. Are there certain choices that are easier than others? Is Saboor's sacrifice when he allows Pari to be adopted easier or more difficult than Parwana's sacrifice of her sister? How are they similar and how are they different? Who else makes sacrifices in the book? What do you think the author is saying about the nature of the decisions we make in our lives and the ways in which they affect others?

4. "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, / there is a field. I'll meet you there." The author chose this thirteenth-century Rumi poem as the epigraph for the book. Discuss the novel in light of this poem. What do you think he is saying about right doing and wrongdoing in the lives of his characters, or in the world?

5. The book raises many deep questions about the wavering line between right and wrong, and whether it is possible to be purely "good"—or purely "bad." What do you think after reading the novel: Are good intentions enough to create good deeds? Can positive actions come from selfish motivations? Can bad come from positive intent? How do you think this novel would define a good person? How would you define one?

6. Discuss the question of wrongdoing and right doing in the context of the different characters and their major dilemmas in the book : Saboor and his daughter Pari; Parwana and her sister, Masooma; the expats, Idris and Timur, and the injured girl, Roshi; Adel, his warlord father, and their interactions with Gholam and his father (and Abdullah's half brother), Iqbal; Thalia and her mother. Do any of them regret the things they have done? What impact does it have on them?

7. The overlapping relationships of the different characters are complex and reflective of real life. Discuss the connections between the different characters, how they are made, grow, and are sustained. Consider all the ways in which an event in one of the families in the book can resonate in the lives of so many other characters. Can you name some examples?

8. Saboor's bedtime story to his children opens the book. To what degree does this story help justify Saboor's heart-wrenching act in the next chapter? In what ways do other characters in the novel use storytelling to help justify or interpret their own actions? Think about your own experiences. In what ways do you use stories to explain your own past?

9. Two homes form twin focal points for the novel: the family home of Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari—and later Iqbal and Gholam—in Shadbagh; and the grand house initially owned by Suleiman in Kabul. Compare the homes and the roles they play in the novel. Who has claims to each house? What are those claims based on? How do the questions of ownership complicate how the characters relate to one another?

10. The old oak tree in Shadbagh plays an important role for many different characters (Parwana, Masooma, Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari) during its life. What is its significance in the story? What do its branches represent? Why do you think Saboor cuts it down? How does its stump come back as an important landmark later on?

11. In addition to all of the important family relationships in the book, there are also many non-genetic bonds between characters, some of them just as strong. Discuss some of these specific relationships and what needs they fill. What are the differences between these family and nonfamily bonds? What do you think the author is trying to say about the presence of these relationships in our lives?

12. *And the Mountains Echoed* begins in Afghanistan, moves to Europe and Greece, and ends in California, gradually widening its perspective. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish by including so many different settings and nationalities? What elements of the characters' different experiences would you say are universal? Do you think the characters themselves would see it that way?

13. Discuss the title, *And the Mountains Echoed*, and why you think it was chosen. Can you find examples of echoes or recurrences in the plot? In the structure of the storytelling?

### **Further Reading:**

#### Ghana Must Go by Taiye Selasi

Kweku Sai is dead. A renowned surgeon and failed husband, he succumbs suddenly at dawn outside his home in suburban Accra. The news of Kweku's death sends a ripple around the world, bringing together the family he abandoned years before. In the wake of Kweku's death, his children gather in Ghana at their mother's enigmatic new home. The eldest son and his wife; the beautiful mysterious twins; and the baby sister, now a young woman: each carries secrets of their own. What is revealed in their coming together is the story of how they unraveled: the hearts broken, the lies told, the crimes committed in the name of love. Splintered, alone, each navigates their pain, believing that what has been lost can never be recovered—until, in Ghana, a new way forward, a new family, begins to emerge. Moving with great elegance through time and place, *Ghana Must Go* charts the Sais' circuitous journey back to one another. *Ghana Must Go* is their story.

#### The Blind Man's Garden by Nadeem Aslam

Jeo and Mikal are foster brothers from a small town in Pakistan. Inseparable as children, their adult lives have widely diverged: Jeo is a dedicated medical student, and newly married; Mikal has been a vagabond since he was fifteen, in love with a woman he can't have. When Jeo decides to sneak across the border into Afghanistan—not to fight with the Taliban against the Americans, but rather to help care for wounded civilians—Mikal pledges to go with him, and protect him. As the narrative takes us from the wilds of Afghanistan to the heart of the family left behind we see all of these lives upended by the turmoil of war.

### The Swallows of Kabul by Yasmina Khadra

Set in Kabul under the rule of the Taliban, this extraordinary novel takes readers into the lives of two couples: Mohsen, son of a family of wealthy shopkeepers whom the Taliban destroyed; and Zunaira, his wife, exceedingly beautiful, who was once a brilliant teacher. Intersecting their world is Atiq, a prison keeper, a man who has sincerely adopted the Taliban ideology and struggles to keep his faith, and his wife, Musarrat, who once rescued Atiq and is now dying of sickness and despair. Desperate, exhausted Mohsen wanders through Kabul when he is surrounded by a crowd about to stone an adulterous woman. Drawn into their rage, he also throws stones at the face of the condemned woman. With this act the lives of all four protagonists move toward their destinies. *The Swallows of Kabul* is a dazzling novel written with compassion and exquisite detail by one of the most lucid writers about the mentality of Islamic fundamentalists and the complexities of the Muslim world.

### Life After Life by Kate Atkinson

On a cold and snowy night in 1910, Ursula Todd is born, the third child of a wealthy English banker and his wife. Sadly, she dies before she can draw her first breath. In another realm on that same cold and snowy night, Ursula Todd is born, lets out a lusty wail, and embarks upon a life that will be, to say the least, unusual. What if there were an infinite number of chances to live your life over again? Ursula does get those opportunities, as she grows, she also dies, repeatedly, in any number of ways. She lives through turbulent events of the last century again and again. Will Ursula save the world from its own inevitable destiny?

### Ordinary Grace by William Kent Kruegar

New Bremen, Minnesota, 1961 was a time of innocence and hope for a country with a new, young president. However, for thirteen-year-old Frank Drum it was a summer in which death assumed many forms. When tragedy unexpectedly comes to call on his family, including his Methodist minister father, his passionate, artistic mother, Juilliard-bound older sister, and wise-beyond-his years kid brother. Frank finds himself thrust into an adult world full of secrets, lies, adultery, and betrayal. Told from Frank's perspective forty years after that fateful summer, it is a moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God. On the surface, *Ordinary Grace* is the story of the murder of a beautiful young woman, a beloved daughter and sister. At heart, it's the story of what that tragedy does to a boy, his family, and ultimately the fabric of the small town in which he lives.