

# The Kite Runner

## Extra Credit

There is so much history and depth to the cultures and the peoples who call the Middle East home that it is difficult to cover each area, each time period in depth during our few short weeks of study. To help you become better acquainted with the people of this area, you'll have an opportunity to do some independent exploring. Below you will find a movie and book recommendation list. Select one book or movie based in the Middle East, either from this list or one you discover on your own, have both Ms. Ward and a parent/guardian sign the attached permission form, and start reading (or watching). Once you've finished, write a 2-3 page report on your selected piece. Your written report should **NOT** be a book report. Instead it is a **narrative reflection** that incorporates a **THEME** from the movie or text and connects it to what we have been studying about the Middle East in either your English or World Cultures course. Finish this assignment by **May 22<sup>nd</sup>**, and you can earn up to 10 extra credit points!

### MOVIES:

- [\*Motherland Afghanistan\*](#) (2007)  
Afghani-American filmmaker Sedika Mojadidi shadows her father, a women's health specialist working to rebuild hospitals in war-torn Afghanistan, in this thought-provoking documentary filmed in the wake of the United States' invasion of the region. In a country where one in seven women dies during childbirth, many women are willing to travel for days to receive adequate care from a trained professional. This can be streamed from Netflix. (Description from Netflix)
- [\*The Beauty Academy of Kabul\*](#) (2006)  
Proving that vanity and the pursuit of beauty are universal, this 2004 documentary tracks a group of American women (including some Afghan émigrés from the 1980s) who open a beauty school in Afghanistan. Though there are culture clashes aplenty, moments of true kinship also transpire over curling rods and comb-outs as these women from divergent worlds labor in the name physical beauty in director Liz Mermin's refreshing film. This can be streamed from Netflix. (Description from Netflix)
- [\*Persepolis\*](#) (2007- Rated PG-13)  
Marjane (voiced by Chiara Mastroianni) just wants to be an ordinary kid, but that isn't easy in 1978 Iran. This profound animated film follows Marjane's childhood in a repressive society, her adolescence in France and her return to Tehran as an adult. Based on Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, this Oscar nominee for Best Animated Feature Film also features the vocal talents of Catherine Deneuve and Simon Abkarian. This can be streamed from Netflix. (Description from Netflix)

### BOOKS:

#### Palestine and Israel

- [\*Dawn\*](#) by Elie Wiesel  
Elisha is a young Jewish man, a Holocaust survivor, and an Israeli freedom fighter in British-controlled Palestine; John Dawson is the captured English officer he will murder at dawn in retribution for the British execution of a fellow freedom fighter. The night-long wait for morning and death provides *Dawn*, Elie Wiesel's ever more timely novel, with its harrowingly taut, hour-by-hour narrative. Caught between the manifold horrors of the past and the troubling dilemmas of the present, Elisha wrestles with guilt, ghosts, and ultimately God as he waits for the appointed hour and his act of assassination. *Dawn* is an eloquent meditation on the compromises, justifications, and sacrifices that human beings make when they murder other human beings. (Review from Amazon.com)
- [\*The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East\*](#) by Sandy Tolan  
Tolan offers listeners an easy-to-follow journey through a maddeningly stubborn conflict that has infused global politics since the 1940s. Based on his 1998 NPR documentary, Tolan personalizes the Arab-Israeli conflict by tracing the intertwined lives of a Palestinian refugee named Bashir Al-Khairi and a Jewish settler named Dalia Eshkenazi Landau. The pair is connected through a stone home in Ramla, now part of Israel. Built in the 1930s by Bashir's father, the Al-Khairi family was forced to flee during the violent formation of Israel in 1948. The Eshkenazis, Holocaust survivors from Bulgaria, became the new owners. After 1967's Six Day War, Bashir showed up and Dalia invited him in and began an intense dialogue that's lasted four decades. Tolan's evenhanded narration imparts the passion of both sides without slipping into impassioned delivery. While at times his random emphasis of words makes for a slightly wavy cadence, his pronunciation of Arab and Jewish names and phrases is pleasingly authentic. One of Tolan's most moving passages chronicles Dalia 20-mile trip to Ramallah to visit Bashir. Their seemingly simple conversation, rendered with just the right amount of heart, crystallizes and humanizes the positions of each side. *The Lemon Tree* is a clear-eyed and steady ride into deeply felt and ever-volatile territory. (Review from Amazon.com)
- [\*19 Varieties of Gazelles: Poems of the Middle East\*](#) by Naomi Shihab Nye  
As she grieved over the "huge shadow [that] had been cast across the lives of so many innocent people and an ancient culture's pride" after September 11, 2001, poet and author Naomi Shihab Nye's natural response was to write, to grasp "onto details to stay afloat." Accordingly, Nye has gathered over four dozen of her own poems about the Middle East and about being an Arab American living in the United States. Devoted followers of the award-winning and beloved poet will recognize some of their favorites from her earlier collections, while absorbing themselves in her new haunting and evocative poems. Nye writes of figs and olives, fathers' blessings and grandmothers' hands that "recognize grapes, / and the damp shine of a goat's new skin." She writes of Palestinians, living and dead, of war, and of peace. Readers of all ages will be profoundly moved by the vitality and hope in these beautiful lines from Nye's heart. (Review from Amazon.com)

## Iran and Iraq

- [\*Persepolis\*](#) by Marjane Satrapi  
This is currently Philadelphia's choice of the 2010 One Book, One Philadelphia project. "A memoir of growing up as a girl in revolutionary Iran, *Persepolis* provides a unique glimpse into a nearly unknown and unreachable way of life... That Satrapi chose to tell her remarkable story as a gorgeous comic book makes it totally unique and indispensable." --*Time*
- [\*Women of De Koh: Lives in an Iranian Village\*](#) by Erika Friedl  
This fascinating collection lifts their concealing veils to bring us face to face with the women of a contemporary Iranian mountain village. Their situations are primitive and oppressive by Western standards, but the author, an anthropologist who has lived a number of years in Iran, lets the women speak through her deft pen, capturing their voices in tales of domestic power politics, childbearing, barrenness, marriage, old age. Like the relationships in this village of gossipy, intermarried and extended families, the 12 stories are interconnected, revealing a pungent, incisive view of women's society as a whole, and multifaceted portraits of some memorable individuals. (Review from Amazon.com)
- [\*Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir of Books\*](#) by Azar Nafisi  
In 1995, after resigning from her job as a professor at a university in Tehran due to repressive policies, Azar Nafisi invited seven of her best female students to attend a weekly study of great Western literature in her home. Since the books they read were officially banned by the government, the women were forced to meet in secret, often sharing photocopied pages of the illegal novels. For two years they met to talk, share, and "shed their mandatory veils and robes and burst into color." Though most of the women were shy and intimidated at first, they soon became emboldened by the forum and used the meetings as a springboard for debating the social, cultural, and political realities of living under strict Islamic rule. (Review from Amazon.com)
- [\*Sunrise Over Fallujah\*](#) by Walter Dean Myers  
Operation Iraqi Freedom, that's the code name. But Robin Perry, an ambivalent recruit from Harlem, and all his fellow soldiers in the Civil Affairs Battalion have a simpler name for it: WAR. Perry and the rest of his unit soon find their definition of "winning" the war in Iraq ever more elusive and their good intentions being replaced by terms like "survival" and "despair." (Review from Scholastic)
- [\*Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog From Iraq\*](#) by Riverbend  
Iraqi women's voices have been virtually silent since the fall of Baghdad. Yet four months after Saddam's statue toppled in April 2003, the pseudonymous Riverbend, a Baghdad native then 24 years old, began blogging about life in the city in dryly idiomatic English and garnered an instant following. This year's worth of Riverbend's commentary--passionate, frustrated, sarcastic and sometimes hopeful--runs to September 2004. Before the war, Riverbend was a computer programmer, living with her parents and brother in relative affluence; as she chronicles the privations her family experiences under occupation, there is a good deal of "complaining and ranting" about erratic electricity, intermittent water supplies, near daily explosions, gas shortages and travel restrictions. (Review from Amazon.com)

## Afghanistan

- [\*A Thousand Splendid Suns\*](#) by Khaled Hosseini  
It's difficult to imagine a harder first act to follow than *The Kite Runner*: a debut novel by an unknown writer about a country many readers knew little about that has gone on to have over four million copies in print worldwide. But when preview copies of Khaled Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, started circulating at Amazon.com, readers reacted with a unanimous enthusiasm that few of us could remember seeing before. As special as *The Kite Runner* was, those readers said, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is more so, bringing Hosseini's compassionate storytelling and his sense of personal and national tragedy to a tale of two women that is weighted equally with despair and grave hope.
- [\*Under the Persimmon Tree\*](#) by Suzanne Fisher Staples  
*Under the Persimmon Tree* alternates between two narrators: Najmah, a young Afghan girl whose father and brother are unwillingly taken away by the Taliban to fight, and whose mother and newborn brother are blown up in an air raid. She makes her way to Pakistan, where she meets Nusrat, an American woman married to an Afghan doctor who is missing. While the book is fiction, Staples says most if not all of the incidents are based on stories Afghans told her, including the story of a young girl who witnessed the death of her mother and brother.
- [\*Other Side of the Sky\*](#) by Farah Ahmedi  
"Very compelling. . . . Here you have a girl, a child, who suffered her own disability, [and] the loss of her family and her homeland. She's taking care of her aging mother and adapting to this new culture, and she's a bright, shining light in the world. . . . Very moving." - Mary Karr, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Liar's Club* and *Cherry*
- [\*West of Kabul, East of New York\*](#) by Tamim Ansary  
Ansary, who was raised in pre-Russian-client Afghanistan, the son of an exemplar of that nation's civil elite and of an American his father met while studying abroad, moved to the United States in time to live out college and urban cool in the Sixties and Seventies. But this Afghan American, writing in response to one awful day and in fact extending to book-length some of the notions he posited in a widely read e-mail on September 12, 2001, tells truths about dislocation, heritage, home, family, and religion that both affirm life and profoundly sadden. Ansary's account of how his brother chose to stay "east of New York," of his travels through Muslim communities at the time of the Iranian hostage crisis, and of his personal collision with conspiracy theory are particularly unsettling and worth any reader's time. (Review from Amazon.com)
- [\*The Photographer: Into War-torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders\*](#) by Emmanuel Guibert  
In 1986, Afghanistan was torn apart by a war with the Soviet Union. This graphic novel/photo-journal is a record of one reporter's arduous and dangerous journey through Afghanistan accompanying the Doctors Without Borders. Didier Lefèvre's photography, paired with the art of Emmanuel Guibert, tells the powerful story of a mission undertaken by men and women dedicated to mending the wounds of war. (Review from Amazon.com)

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Extra Credit

## INDEPENDENT PROJECT APPROVAL FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Book/Movie: \_\_\_\_\_

Author of Book/Movie: \_\_\_\_\_

How will you obtain a copy of this book/movie? \_\_\_\_\_

Short description of book/movie (if not on Ms. Ward's recommended list): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Two reasons for selecting this book/movie:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

By signing this form, both the student and parent/guardian understand that the student is committing to obtain the above book or movie on his or her own. It is important that parents and guardians review the independent book or movie selected by the student, especially if it was not selected from Ms. Ward's recommended list, to ensure it is appropriate for class. This extra credit project is due **December 18, 2009**.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Parent/Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date