



Discussion Questions
A Thousand Splendid Suns
by Khaled Hosseini

- 1) What were some of your initial thoughts and impressions of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*? How can we process such emotionally disturbing content?
- 2) Why does a friendship evolve between Miriam and Laila, despite inflicted divisions?
- 3) Mariam recalls her mother, Nana, saying of snow that “each snowflake was a sigh heaved by an aggrieved woman somewhere in the world. That all the sighs drifted up the sky, gathered into clouds, then broke into tiny pieces that fell silently on the people below. *As a reminder of how women like us suffer, she’d said. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us*” (p.91). Discuss the sentiment of this remark, how it reflects power structures, and how it applied to the women of the book.
- 4) This text exposes several layers of violence in Afghanistan; in 2011, it was deemed the most dangerous country in the world for women by AlertNet. Discuss the disparate impact of war and conflict on women and girls.
- 5) What were some acts of courage and defiance against the Taliban’s imposed rules? What is an appropriate response from the international community to such policies and gender-based violence? What about arguments of cultural relativism?
- 6) After Laila desperately fights for her personal safety while Rasheed attacks and beats her, she is upstairs, knowing Rasheed has gone down to find Mariam. She describes what she hears simply as “the act of beating and being beaten” (p.268). While Rasheed makes a perfect villain, down to his “yellow, toothy grin” (p.218) as he advances toward 14-year-old Laila, we know that domestic violence is perpetrated by men in all walks of life, including attractive, respected men – across countries, cultures, and income brackets. What societal constructs about gender facilitate this violence?
- 7) Discuss the character of Miriam and the meaning of “a thousand splendid suns.”
- 8) In Part IV, Laila’s dream of being with Tariq is finally realized, and they’re living in Murree. Despite finally being with the man she loves, and in a peaceful community, the mood of the book is still sobering. During their wedding ceremony, “there were no tears, no wedding-day smiles, no whispered oaths of long-lasting love. In silence, Laila looked at their reflection, at faces that had aged beyond their years, at the pouches and lines and sags that now marked their once-scrubbed, youthful faces” (p.376). Discuss the permanent effects of violence and conflict.
- 9) The mood of the book lifts slightly when Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan in 2002. A poem posted by Zaman in the school reads: “Joseph shall return to Canaan, grieve not, Hovels shall turn to rose gardens, grieve not. If a flood should arrive, to drown all that’s alive, Noah is your guide in the typhoon’s eye, grieve not” (p.413). What do you think compels Laila to return?
- 10) Did you find moments of hope, beauty, or joy in the midst of the hopelessness of this book?