*Kite Runner* Chapter 22 Close Reading

I DON’T KNOW if I gave Assef a good fight. I don’t think I did. How could I have? That was the first time I’d fought anyone. I had never so much as thrown a punch in my entire life. (#1)

My memory of the fight with Assef is amazingly vivid in stretches: I remember Assef turning on the music before slipping on his brass knuckles. The prayer rug, the one with the oblong, woven Mecca, came loose from the wall at one point and landed on my head; the dust from it made me sneeze. I remember Assef shoving grapes in my face, his snarl all spit-shining teeth, his bloodshot eyes rolling. His turban fell at some point, let loose curls of shoulder-length blond hair. (#2)

And the end, of course. That, I still see with perfect clarity. I always will.

Mostly, I remember this: His brass knuckles flashing in the afternoon light; how cold they felt with the first few blows and how quickly they warmed with my blood. Getting thrown against the wall, a nail where a framed picture may have hung once jabbing at my back. Sohrab screaming. Tabla, harmonium, a dil-roba. Getting hurled against the wall. The knuckles shattering my jaw. Choking on my own teeth, swallowing them, thinking about all the countless hours I’d spent flossing and brushing. (#3) Getting hurled against the wall. Lying on the floor, blood from my split upper lip staining the mauve carpet, pain ripping through my belly, and wondering when I’d be able to breathe again. The sound of my ribs snapping like the tree branches Hassan and I used to break to swordfight like Sinbad in those old movies. Sohrab screaming. The side of my face slamming against the corner of the television stand. That snapping sound again, this time just under my left eye. Music. Sohrab screaming. Fingers grasping my hair, pulling my head back, the twinkle of stainless steel. Here they come. That snapping sound yet again, now my nose. Biting down in pain, noticing how my teeth didn’t align like they used to. Getting kicked. Sohrab screaming. (#4)

I don’t know at what point I started laughing, but I did. It hurt to laugh, hurt my jaws, my ribs, my throat. But I was laughing and laughing. And the harder I laughed, the harder he kicked me, punched me, scratched me.

“WHAT’S SO FUNNY?” Assef kept roaring with each blow. His spittle landed in my eye. Sohrab screamed.

“WHAT’S SO FUNNY?” Assef bellowed. Another rib snapped, this time left lower. What was so funny was that, for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in a corner of my mind, I’d even been looking forward to this. I remembered the day on the hill I had pelted Hassan with pomegranates and tried to provoke him. He’d just stood there, doing nothing, red juice soaking through his shirt like blood. Then he’d taken the pomegranate from my hand, crushed it against his forehead. Are you satisfied now? he’d hissed. Do you feel better? I hadn’t been happy and I hadn’t felt better, not at all. But I did now. My body was broken--just how badly I wouldn’t find out until later--but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed. (#5)

1. Why does Amir make this statement about his lack of memory regarding the fight?

2. Why did Hosseini pick these particular details to illustrate the fight with Assef?

3. Again, why this detail about brushing and flossing?

4. Explain how Hosseini uses syntax to achieve a particular effect in this paragraph. Be sure to explain what effect he achieves before explaining how syntax contributes to this effect.

5. Fully explain what this paragraph means for Amir.