*Kite Runner* Chapter 5 Close Reading

The Indian man in the brown suit smiled and offered Hassan his hand. “I am Dr. Kumar,” he said. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” He spoke Farsi with a thick, rolling Hindi accent.

“Salaam alaykum,” Hassan said uncertainly. He gave a polite tip of the head, but his eyes sought his father behind him. Ali moved closer and set his hand on Hassan’s shoulder.

Baba met Hassan’s wary--and puzzled--eyes. “I have summoned Dr. Kumar from New Delhi. Dr. Kumar is a plastic surgeon.”

“Do you know what that is?” the Indian man--Dr. Kumar-- said.

Hassan shook his head. He looked to me for help but I shrugged. All I knew was that you went to a surgeon to fix you when you had appendicitis. I knew this because one of my classmates had died of it the year before and the teacher had told us they had waited too long to take him to a surgeon. We both looked to Ali, but of course with him you could never tell. His face was impassive as ever, though something sober had melted into his eyes.

“Well,” Dr. Kumar said, “my job is to fix things on people’s bodies. Sometimes their faces.” “Oh,” Hassan said. He looked from Dr. Kumar to Baba to Ali. His hand touched his upper lip.

“Oh,” he said again.

“It’s an unusual present, I know,” Baba said. “And probably not what you had in mind, but this present will last you forever.”

“Oh,” Hassan said. He licked his lips. Cleared his throat. “Agha sahib, will it... will it--”

“Nothing doing,” Dr. Kumar intervened, smiling kindly. “It will not hurt you one bit. In fact, I will give you a medicine and you will not remember a thing.”

“Oh,” Hassan said. He smiled back with relief. A little relief anyway. “I wasn’t scared, Agha sahib, I just...” Hassan might have been fooled, but I wasn’t. I knew that when doctors said it wouldn’t hurt, that’s when you knew you were in trouble. With dread, I remembered my circumcision the year prior. The doctor had given me the same line, reassured me it wouldn’t hurt one bit. But when the numbing medicine wore off later that night, it felt like someone had pressed a red hot coal to my loins. Why Baba waited until I was ten to have me circumcised was beyond me and one of the things I will never forgive him for. (#1)

I wished I too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba’s sympathy. It wasn’t fair. Hassan hadn’t done anything to earn Baba’s affections; he’d just been born with that stupid harelip. (#2)

The surgery went well. We were all a little shocked when they first removed the bandages, but kept our smiles on just as Dr. Kumar had instructed us. It wasn’t easy, because Hassan’s upper lip was a grotesque mesh of swollen, raw tissue. I expected Hassan to cry with horror when the nurse handed him the mirror. Ali held his hand as Hassan took a long, thoughtful look into it. He muttered something I didn’t understand. I put my ear to his mouth. He whispered it again.

“Tashakor.” Thank you.

Then his lips twisted, and, that time, I knew just what he was doing. He was smiling. Just as he had, emerging from his mother’s womb.

The swelling subsided, and the wound healed with time. Soon, it was just a pink jagged line running up from his lip. By the following winter, it was only a faint scar. Which was ironic. Because that was the winter that Hassan stopped smiling. (#4)

1. What is your impression of Baba based on the fact that he waited until Amir was ten before having him circumcised?

2. Does your impression of Baba change when you consider the gift he’s giving Hassan?

3. What symbolic value do you see in the elimination of Hassan’s scar?

4. What literary device do you find—besides irony—in the final two sentences of this passage?

5. Describe Hassan’s personality in a few sentences and name three details in this passage that demonstrate Hassan’s personality.