When asked what his favorite symbol in the novel is (kites, aside), Khaled Hosseini describes the scene in the alley as having “a metaphoric quality to it, and the rape scene [of Hassan]. A lot of fellow Afghans feel like that’s what happened to their country, if you substitute Afghanistan for Hassan. After Hassan has served his purpose and found what Amir wanted, the kite, then Amir kind of stands by and watches him be attacked without intervening. … A lot of Afghans feel that’s what happened [after the Soviet Union left and Western countries failed to help the country].

* Discuss rape as a means of exerting power or control over someone else.
* Talk about the comparison that Mr. Hosseini makes, and discuss the power dynamics at play in both the novel and the larger world.
* How does this scene symbolize Afghanistan’s position on the world stage?
* Connect the sexual violence in the novel to violence (sexual and otherwise) in the news today, whether rape on college campuses, in the N.F.L., via high school hazings, or in any other context. Who is wielding violence against whom in these instances? What does the nature of such attacks tell us about our culture? About human nature? What lessons does “The Kite Runner” offer for our world today?