English II Honors Summer Reading Annotation Guide

2026-2027 Academic Year

Summer Reading Assignment: Read and annotate *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. This is the only assignment that must be completed by the start of classes.

Please review this entire document before reading the novel.

This document includes:

1. An overview of annotation practices
2. Options and suggestions for how to annotate your text
3. A list of topics specific to your novel that you should make note of as you read
4. Notes on what activities you will be asked to do in relation to the summer reading novel when school begins
5. A brief biography of the novel's author
6. Links and resources that you can use to explore the context of the novel

Annotation Guide:

Please note that this is a general guide that can be adapted to suit your own needs or the specific text that you are reading. You should start with the suggestions on this guide, then you can adapt your annotation style as you see fit.

1. **Annotating a text**: Annotation refers to marking up your text by physically writing on it, using sticky notes or other markers, and/or taking notes as you read. Annotation is a key skill to learn as you develop into a sophisticated critical reader, writer, and thinker; it is also an important skill that will help you succeed in college classes. The purpose of annotation is to keep a record of your thoughts and questions as you read. This is especially useful to you as you complete your summer reading, as you will read the novel outside of class and will need to retain your knowledge of the text into the first quarter of the academic year. The following is a suggested annotation guide for each method listed above.

    a. **Marking up the text**: **This is the recommended method for annotating**. If you use this method, you will physically write in and on your book as you read. Differentiate your annotations as follows:
        1. Underline key lines and/or passages. An alternative annotation would be to place a star in the margin next to key lines/passages. The purpose of underlining or marking key passages with a star is to help you remember where to find the most significant portions of the text. Passages may be significant because they highlight key plot events, point out important qualities of the main characters, or emphasize central themes or motifs of

the work, which are essential to analyzing the text's meaning. In addition to underlining or marking with a star, it is best to record your thoughts in the margins or in a separate journal so you can remember what you thought was important about the passages.

2. Write a question mark in the margin next to passages or lines that you find confusing or that you have questions about. It is best to write out your question in the margins or in a separate journal so that you can remember what confused you about the passage.
3. Circle unknown words; look up the new words as you read so that you can both better understand the text and build your vocabulary. Write the definition in your book or in a separate journal. Even if you are slightly unsure of a word's meaning, it's a good idea to look up the word to clarify the meaning.
4. Develop a system of annotations specifically related to your text to help you keep track of specific issues/characters/themes as you read. For example, if the protagonist is named Joe, you might write a "J" next to the passages in the text that describe his character or tell us something important about his character. See more specific suggestions for these types of annotations below, in the annotation guidelines for *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.
5. To reiterate point 1, make sure that you go beyond simply highlighting or underlining; you want to be able to remember WHY you marked these lines when you go back into the text to write your essay or participate in class discussions and activities. Please note that when I give you grades for annotating a text, those that only underline/highlight without making additional notes will earn only partial credit.

b. **Sticky note annotation**: If you prefer not to write on your text or you are using a borrowed copy of a text, you may wish to use a set of sticky notes to annotate your text. For example, you might use the Post-It brand flags (usually four or five different colors). You can decide what color to assign to each detail you want to annotate. You can also write very small, short notes on these skinny sticky note flags, or you may use bigger sticky notes that have more room for your writing. See the more detailed instructions for annotations above.
    1. Place a blue sticky note next to key passages.
    2. Place an orange sticky note and write a question mark on the notes when you come across a passage that is confusing or about which you have questions. You could also write more detailed versions of your questions in a separate journal. Again, it's very important that you record your thoughts and ideas so you can remember why you are noting these lines or passages.
    3. Place a yellow sticky note near unknown or unfamiliar words. Write the definition on the sticky note or in a separate journal.
    4. Use the remaining colors to annotate other details about the text (characters, themes, etc.). You might want to assign a different color to each theme or character, or you may want to use the same color but write a short annotation

A Thousand Splendid Suns, Khaled Hosseini
Published in 2007

When we return to class, we will focus on a few key features of this text. Be sure to consider these as you read, while you annotate, and after you complete the novel:

1. Characterization – pay close attention to the ways Hosseini builds the characters of Mariam and Laila. Think about how they are similar (in terms of personality, upbringing, development, etc.) and how they are different. Consider whether they are ultimately more similar or different. What kind of relationship do the women have with one another? How does their relationship cause each individual woman to change and grow?
2. Gender roles and Afghani society – what are the expectations of women in this society? How do the expectations and gender roles change after the Taliban takes control of Kabul? How do gender roles impact the relationships between characters in the novel?
3. Education – what are different stances on education presented in the novel, particularly education for women? What role does education play in each of our female protagonist's lives and how does it contribute to the person each woman becomes?
4. Notions of home – how do characters in this novel feel about their homeland of Afghanistan? How do these feelings change or evolve and why? Ultimately, what connection does each woman have to her homeland?
5. Family – what versions of family do you see in this novel? What makes a family work well and what causes conflict within a family? How does the novel challenge traditional ideas of family?

Required Activities (all of these will be completed once school begins and are NOT due on the first day of class):

1. Class discussions of characters, contexts, plot, themes, and writing style
2. Group discussions and close reading work
3. An analytical essay in which you will write a thesis and support your argument with textual evidence
4. Additional work to be announced early in the semester

About the author: Khaled Hosseini is an Afghani-American writer who has published three novels – *The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns,* and *And the Mountains Echoed*—to critical and popular acclaim. Hosseini also published *Sea Prayer,* an illustrated work of fiction framed as a letter from a father to a son and invoking the recent refugee crisis. Hosseini's novels are not autobiographical, but he does draw from his experiences growing up in Afghanistan and his continuing love and concern for his homeland. He was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965 and moved to San Jose, California in 1980 when his family sought asylum in the United States. Hosseini studied biology and practiced medicine before publishing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, in 2001. He has served as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations' Refugee Agency and established the Khaled Hosseini foundation, a nonprofit that provides humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

Summarized from the author's bio on Khaledhosseni.com

Useful Links:

"The history of Afghanistan summarized" – a brief history of the country; the last few minutes will be most relevant to *ATSS*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6usr-C3lcQ

PBS News, "What life is like for Afghanis under Taliban control"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COElcZITKrM

PBS News, "Afghan women share stories of surviving abuse"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X2hGQ7V_Ro

"Khaled Hosseini discusses A Thousand Splendid Suns"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4kyalTT_wY