

Stephanie Tran Rojas

Grade 10

Mira Mesa High School

Mira Mesa Library

Which Book I Would Save and Why

If all the books in the world were to disappear, *The Kite Runner* should be saved. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini illustrates a soul wrenching account of Afghanistan during the overthrow of the monarchy, the Russian invasion, and the rise of the Taliban from the perspective of a young Afghan, Amir. He is a wealthy Pashtun boy that lives a life of luxury in Khabul, Afghanistan, with his father Baba and Hazara servant Hassan. His perspective gives a modern outlook to these historical events and cultural attitudes as he experiences life in Afghanistan and reaches America as a refugee. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini depicts the unavoidable dark truths of human nature and enforces universal guidelines through a modern, reeling plot.

Amir is a regular boy that readers can quickly relate to. As Hassan and Amir run kites, Amir's insecurities are evident as he compares himself to Hassan. "I tripped over a rock and fell---I wasn't just slower than Hassan but clumsier, too; I'd always envied his natural athleticism (53). Envy is one of the seven deadly sins, a timeless piece of human nature that is exemplified in *The Kite Runner*. Amir is insecure about his own value because he envies Hassan's athletic nature which Baba seems to favor. Amir's envy will grow into spite as his self-pity increases. This modern example of a universal lesson from the first book itself will spark the reader's interest. Amir attacks Hassan with pomegranates due to his suffocation from guilt and remorse. "I wished he'd give me the punishment I craved, so maybe I'd finally sleep at night. Maybe things could then return to how they used to be between us. But Hassan did nothing as I pelted him again and again. Remorse and guilt accompany self loathing as an average person would experience it, but Hosseini emphasizes them in a way that completely explains what the character experiences from a usual incomprehensible level Readers quickly relate to Amir's flawed persona in *The Kite Runner*.

The Kite Runner, a realistic fiction novel points out the ugly truth about human behavior. Amir is continually aware of the unfair advantage he had been given as a Pashtun male. "I cringed a little at the power I'd been granted, and all because I had won at the genetic lottery that had determined my sex" (149). Amir's awareness of the inequality among the sexes puts forth the truly discomfiting nature of this injustice. Males are prized over females in the Afghan culture and given more freedom as an individual. Females are subject to harsh criticism from their society on the slightest unreserved action in a culture where honor and reputation are the backbones of life while males are forgiven for their youthful actions simply due to their gender. As Assef, the main antagonist, prepares to attack Hassan, he insults him by saying, "'I'll tell you why, Hazara. Because to him, you're nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he's bored, something he can kick when he's angry. Don't ever fool yourself and think you're something more'"(72). As Amir observes the sea's motions and remains quiet, the reader realizes that Assef speaks the truth. Hassan remains loyal to Amir, of course, but remains in denial as to what Amir really feels toward him. He thinks lowly of Hassan and rightfully so due to his social standing as a Hazara, a subservient race. *The Kite Runner* emphasizes the raw and barren nature of multiple injustices to the reader.

In addition to exposing social injustices of modern society, Hosseini's writing evokes intense emotion from his readers. Amir's narration as he is beaten half to death by Assef when attempting to retrieve Sohrab describes Sohrab screaming. Getting hurled against the wall. The knuckles shattering my jaw. Choking on my own teeth, swallowing them, thinking about the countless hours I'd spent flossing and brushing. 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 sword fight 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.

Hosseini uses short syntax to convey Amir's sporadic thoughts. The syntax allows readers to obtain a personal connection with Amir's emotions. At the same time Amir's account of his abominable beating was more removed and unemotional

than a random stranger witnessing it. This technique amplifies the reader's reaction to the quote by allowing the reader to feel all of Amir's pain for him, hear all of Sohrab's cries for him, and think of his sporadic thoughts for him as Amir sinks into a deeper level of numbness from all the pain he has already withstood. The scene where Amir opens the bathroom door and observes Sohrab after he has attempted to commit suicide drives shivers of suspense through the reader with Hosseini's description. "Suddenly I was on my knees, screaming. Screaming through my clenched teeth. Screaming until I thought my throat would rip and my chest explode. Later they said I was still screaming when the the ambulance arrived " (343). The repetition of the word scream empowers its effect while merely using the word once would carry no weight. Instead the repeated word hangs in the back of the reader's mind, causing him to hear Amir's horrific speech throughout the quote. The descriptions translate how shocked and horrified Amir is when he sees Sohrab's bloodied arms and body soaking in a bath of blood. Khaled Hosseini's writing style provokes more intense emotion in its readers than most authors can accomplish.

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini demonstrates true human faults to educate the reader on undeniable human qualities. Similar to *The Prince* by Machiavelli or *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini illustrates faulty character as a way to accept the imperfection in human beings but does so in a modern fashion that grips the hearts of its readers. *The Kite Runner* achieves demonstrating the real aspects of universal human nature to readers as a way to motivate them to progress toward an improved society.

Brian Truong
Grade 10
Crawford High School
Oak Park Library

If All the Books Were to Disappear

In a dystopian world where all literary texts were destroyed except for one, I would rescue *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, published in 1953. The novel renders a future American society where books are illegal. This book depicts a world without books which results in a dead, unfeeling community living in an apocalyptic period. The main protagonist, Guy Montag, is on a pathway to search for the truth of books while being assisted by characters such as Clarisse and Professor Faber. This book will be interpreted in many ways, but the final result will serve as a trigger for humanity to start writing and saving books.

The day I picked up this book was December 12, 2012. My language arts teacher, Mrs. Thompson, gave us our first book assignment. I am no avid reader, and I do not enjoy books, but this masterpiece extraordinarily changed my biased opinion. The whole class sighed and moaned; some even were rude and insulted her. I am disgusted to say this, but I was one of the ones who also sighed. I am an "A" student so I had to read this book even if I did not want to. After this exhaustion I went home, lay on my bed, and started reading the first chapter. Little did now I would be in for a surprise.

It took a week to finish the novel, but I did not regret it at all. Here is a quick summary. Gus Montag is the protagonist. His career is a fireman, and his job is to only burn books. In the beginning he is an ordinary, void of feeling individual. Throughout the story Guy questions the emptiness of his life. He starts seeking out for answers by reading books. This act is forbidden and is punishable by death. Through reading he feels a mysterious feeling, but a desirable one. He experiences a number of obstacles that prevents him from reading, but in the end after escaping

death, he finds a small group of humans who have already discovered the ecstasy of reading and ability to “feel” emotions just like him.

Guy is a very eccentric fellow. He is self-obsessed, gullible, and a confusing character. He is one of the reasons why I deeply loved this book. He is quite relatable to me. We are both not very social. I also am similar to him as I do not understand “emotions.” I was home schooled nearly my whole life so I did not get to interact with others that much. I was always confused. I had a very crude sense of humor, behavior, and comprehension. I was always rash and did not consider the feelings of others when I said something. This is the reason why I did not have any friends, and even today I believe that I have no friends. This made me feel connected to the character. We both have no friends, and we are both naïve.

The plot was well done; it had plenty of suspense, foreshadowing, and so much more to describe. I was interconnected by the fact that Guy was trying to find the “truth.” He wanted to understand the emptiness inside him by reading books. I am like this in the sense that I always wonder about the extra phenomena in this world. I wonder about the reality of death. When we die, will we just be dead? Will there be no afterlife? Science has proven so much that I have concluded our bodies will just decompose and disappear in a matter of time. I search for truth through science, and Guy searches for it through books.

Guy was not the only character I felt for. The protagonist’s wife, Mildred Montag, made me shed a tear. We are both intertwined in reading technology. She spends her entire day watching television, while I spend uncountable hours on my computer, up to 16 hours a day. We both question the role of ourselves, and her solution was suicide. Professor Faber is the master of Guy. He assisted him in every step and conversation. This character encouraged me to try to get friends. Friends are supposedly entities that assist each other.

This novel has dramatically affected me. The quote, “You’re not like the others. I’ve seen a few. I know. When I talk, you look at me.” This has deeply changed my perspective of talking to others. I’ve learned that most people talk to reply, not to understand. If someone is looking at me, I know they understand, and are not just speaking to reply. “We’re going to meet a lot of lonely people in the next

week and the next month and the next year. And when they ask us what we're doing, you can say, We're remembering. That's where we'll win out in the long run. And someday we'll remember so much that we'll build the biggest grave of all time and shove war in and cover it up. This has indirectly affected me. Every day I am called on to "try hard." I always have the highest scores in my classes, and this is what I am asked. It sometimes demotivates me, but I am constantly reminded of this text. While I am trying to strive for success, others will realize their big mistakes. "Do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has pores." This quotation gave me incentive to read more novels. This made me read all the *Harry Potter* volumes, the *Hunger Games*, and more.

In retrospect I believe *Fahrenheit 451* would be the perfect book to save. It has touching characters, plot, and quotations. If all these objects were to be destroyed beside this, it would help serve to create more books. First timers will be exhilarated by this, and it will result in individuals trying to mimic the concept of this novel. It will eventually lead to a mass production of books with the emergence of writing. While there may be other great books that others believe should be saved, this is my opinion.

Cheyenne Cobb

Grade 10

Kearny School of Business

Linda Vista Library

If all the books in the world were to disappear, and I were able to salvage one, I would choose *Forgotten Fire* by Adam Bagdasarian. This book tells a true but horrific tale of a young boy and his survival during the 1900 Armenian genocide. Vahan Kenderian, a 12-year-old boy who came from a wealthy and respected family believed he would always have the comfort of his own home, hear the laughter of his siblings, have food on the table, and feel a sense of belonging. Within a short three weeks his entire world is stripped away from him. This novel illustrates the cruel nature of humanity in a way that no author has done before.

When I read *Forgotten Fire* I was immediately attached to not only the characters, but the plot as well. The author did a phenomenal job of using details and language to capture the reader's attention. The idea that such absurd and inhumane things were being done to the Armenians and no one was involving themselves to stop the massacres gets the reader emotionally involved and piques the interest.

Another reason why I chose this book to keep is because I was intrigued by the way Vahan handled certain situations, the way he was able to deal with his entire family being murdered, and most of all his techniques with which he used to survive despite insurmountable odds. Vahan used many tactics to survive. These included using his father's memory to encourage him to persevere and adapting to the environments and situations around him. Throughout the novel, Vahan continuously refers back to his father and uses his spirit to help him stay alive. Vahan's father is important to his journey and survival because he provides him with influence, courage, and hope. Another technique Vahan uses is his willingness to adjust to his surroundings and conditions. Vahan begs in order to survive, befriends the man responsible for the mass killings of his friends and family, and pretends to be mute and deaf in order to avoid suspicion.

Also I am able to relate to this book. The main reason I fell in love with this book was because I find myself in the character Vahan. I am Vahan before the Armenian genocide. I believe the same as he does. I believe that I will always have my mother's comfort to wake up to, my grandfather's cooking to consume, and my belongings to cherish. I assume that these things will always be here, and I will never have to think about the fact that they could be taken away from me in a matter of seconds. Simple and small gestures, people or materials that I take for granted every day, could possibly not be here tomorrow. Vahan taught me a valuable lesson, to never take those you love for granted and to always embrace the time and moments you have with them.

Lastly, this book taught me to value my life and be grateful. Whenever I am hungry and in my mind think I am starving, I realize that I have no idea what starving is. When I say I am cold and I quiver my lip, I have no idea what it is like to be freezing. When I sometimes feel that my family is running low on money, and we won't be able to get by, we have no clue what hopeless is. When Vahan's family is murdered, some in front of his face, Vahan feels a loneliness and despair that no teenage boy should ever have to bear. He faces the cruel world alone and has to learn to fend for himself. I am just a little older than Vahan. However, if faced with the same circumstances, I do not believe I would be able to persist through such hardships as he did.

In conclusion, I truly admire this book for its inspirational messages and the harsh portrayal of human reality. I connected with the book and was lucky to have the privilege of reading it. Of all the books I have encountered, *Forgotten Fire* has by far touched me and inspired me the most. Vahan Kenderian is a character whom I will hold close to my heart and never forget his story. That is why if every single book were to disappear, I would choose *Forgotten Fire* to reclaim.

Clayton Halbert

Grade 10

La Jolla High School

Ocean Beach Library

What Resources Are Available to Me at My San Diego Public Library

Throughout my life I have always had a relationship with the public library. Whether in Ocean Beach, Point Loma, or La Jolla, the library has always been a place of incredible resource and assistance. I have never been a person involved with sports, but academic pursuits have always intrigued me. Since I was a little kid, I've flitted from book to book, game to game, movie to movie, absorbing everything I could come across. And the library has helped me all my life, providing something different in each stage I went through whether it was the promise of new worlds to read about and explore, the references that were provided, or simply a communal place to meet with friends, I have always resorted to the library.

When I was a small child, I went down to my local library in Ocean Beach if I wanted to find a new book. I would walk into the branch with my parents and run into the stacks to avoid the glare of the local librarian. And in there I found the respite I needed. At school I was limited in what I was allowed to read, but at a library, reading was a free enterprise. No longer was I stuck with *The Magic Treehouse*, but instead got to move up to greater books: *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, and *the Olympians*, and *Eragon*. I fell in love with these books, each giving me characters to empathize with and worlds to become familiar with. These were experiences that I would have been bereft of if not for the library with the piles of books that I could browse at my pleasure.

Later in my life, the Point Loma Library was rebuilt, giving me a new view of what a library was. Suddenly the library was a light and airy space with the downstairs having activities for the community: movies, computers, video games, a wider selection of books and perhaps best of all –a ship. It was a magical place, both whimsical and full of knowledge and completely in touch with the kid I was at

the time. And the kid I was at the time had developed a love of gaming on the computer, something the library staff catered to. There was a room dedicated to this pursuit with the latest and greatest educational tools on display. The catalog was expanded over the years, broadening not only in its appeal but my tastes along with it. Eventually I grew past that stage in my life.

My journey with the library had hardly finished though. I was at a new school with a much less censored library than before, giving me a far more safe haven than any other before it. I helped sort through the books, recommended ones that should be added to the collection, and was pointed toward particular books that I would enjoy. I started to make friends with the other student volunteers and the kids reading there, giving me a stepping stone into the new environment I found myself in. I had moved to a new school knowing absolutely no one there, but the library was a haven I could get lost in during lunch and recess. And that haven gave me access to people I wouldn't have otherwise spoken to, much less sat down and had a conversation with. Then there would be discussions about the book being read, the latest in the series, or the new Newbery award book that was being heavily advertised. And then I could leave the library once more with relationships I did not have coming in.

Considering that, it's ironic that I and many other kids at La Jolla High use the public library as a place to meet with other students. In addition to being a repository for knowledge and research resources, it was a place we all could meet, considering it was only a short walk from the campus, and it had something I had never encountered before, the private room. It is simply a room that one signs up for and then gets the use of for an hour. The myriad uses I have seen for it are incredible. Tutors take their students there to give them a quiet and safe place to learn. Businessmen have met in there to discuss plans for their small companies or prepare presentations for larger ones. Other students use it for homework and project creation, a place a place away from the hectic outside world. But since I live so far from La Jolla, it was a way for me to meet with other kids about clubs. It was in those private rooms that I wrote a speech for MUN, discussed holding our own conference, built agendas for the Speech and Debate teams and strategized for the

next Quiz Bowl tournaments. But the thing that sets this service apart from my own home is that I get collaboration on it. I now have the ability to work with my peers and get their instant feedback. There is now a way to have an enjoyable face-to-face meeting with others without the logistics of going to houses. Libraries have today become so more than just a book depository. They have instead become centers for the community.

Throughout my life, the library has come to mean so many different things. At first it was simply a place to find books but it's become so much more now. It's changed my life in profound ways, giving me access to art and culture I never had experienced before and providing a communal center for me and my peers.

Uma Talagadadivi

Grade 10

Scripps Ranch High School

Scripps Ranch Library

Words.

As you read this passage, you are reading a collection of words and nothing more than that. As you speak, you're speaking nothing more than a collection of words, phrases of words that you're stringing together. As you think, you're thinking of nothing more than a collection of words, malicious phrases, friendly phrases, loving phrases, all of which are composed of *words*. These words that eventually form phrases are powerful beings, alive in their own way, baring claws, sinking them into raw flesh, or sometimes smiling, and kissing lovingly. These words are so powerful that they've changed the course of history. Other words have caused young teenagers to decide that they are not thin enough, that they must stop eating. Some words have caused people to jump off cliffs, to end their lives. These words have convinced kids my age to do horrible things because they think they're not good enough. At the same time these words have encouraged kids my age to do what they love. They have urged people to stay happy and do wonderful things. As I observe the strength of words. I've come to realize how much they affect the world around me. And I've understood one major thing Words are biting creatures. They are helpful, but they can, at the same time, be vicious. It all depends on how you use them. But it wasn't until I read one book that I realized the true strength of words.

If there is one book that truly affected me, it is *The Book Thief* by Mark Zusak. When I first picked it up at Barnes and Noble, I did so with trepidation. I didn't realize that in a matter of days, my whole perspective of the world around me would change. The novel centers on a young girl, Liesel Meminger, who cannot read at the beginning of the story. She lives with her foster parents in Nazi Germany. By the end of the novel Liesel grows to understand the true value of words. There is one

scene in the book that completely transformed me. Liesel thinks as she comes to a startling realization, “The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them there wouldn’t be any of this. . . what good were the words? (Zusak 521)

What good are words? Why *do* they exist? These thoughts suddenly plagued me, and I could not think of an answer? Yes, I knew that without words our means of communication would be minimal, but although that had been the main purpose of words, I realized that there was much more to them. Suddenly I began to realize that everything from the propaganda that eventually led to the murder of millions, to the thoughts that bullies feed to their victims, the very things that lead young people astray are words. The words I treasured so much as I read wonderful novels that were the same words that were striking innocent people down because at the end of everything, the raw material consisted of words. Words were so powerful, their power terrified me. They haunted me for weeks as I pondered over the very value of words and their significance.

It was then that I came to the conclusion. I was going to use the strength of words to *do good* for the world. I was going to control these uncontrollable words, and I was going to put them to work as harmless loving creatures. The world I belong to is filled with unhappiness. Teenagers are more depressed than they have ever been. And at the root of their depression are the terrible words they heard, read, or thought. But these very same words can transform people and make them happier, better people. I want to use my words for this reason. I want to make the world a better place by using the words I’ve learned in a good way

So along with several of my friends, I started an organization earlier this year to help depressed teenagers have a place where they can talk with us anonymously. They can let all the evil words they’ve thought out and take in thoughts made of happier words. We want to promote happiness and positivity everywhere.

If I had never read *The Book Thief* I don’t think I would have fully understood the power words contain. This novel has helped me transform into who I am today. I now know the impact each word I say can have. I can only hope that one day I will be able to say that I helped someone in the world with the sheer use of words.

I suppose like Liesel, I can now say that “I have hated the words, and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right. (Zusak 528)