

Come Back to Afghanistan

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Using this Teaching Guide:

Teachers are always in search of reading material that can bring their subject matter “alive” for their students; *Come Back to Afghanistan* offers students one such experience. Hyder’s perspective on his time spent in Afghanistan gives students the unique opportunity to see global events through the eyes and voice of a candid peer.

This teaching guide is divided into three sections: prereading activities that will give students a chance to build some background knowledge on Afghanistan’s past and present before reading Hyder’s personal account; reading comprehension questions that will encourage students to read closely and to catch the nuances of Hyder’s story; and post-reading activities that allow students to relate Hyder’s story to their own experiences and to their interests in a variety of related disciplines.

Prereading Activities:

Afghanistan’s Ancient History: Afghanistan has been referred to as the “graveyard of empires” since so many empires did not succeed in conquering this region. Use a large map of Afghanistan as a metaphorical graveyard and have small groups create symbolic tombstones for the empires that met their endings in Afghanistan. Then, have each group write an appropriate epitaph for each empire that “died” in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan’s Recent History: Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a five-year span of Afghanistan’s recent history to research, starting with 1973 (the year Mohammad Daud Khan overthrew the monarchy to establish Afghanistan as a republic) and ending in the present. After each group has completed their research, have them create a mini-timeline of that five-year time period that they will annotate and illustrate for the class. Finally, have groups present and post their section of the timeline, resulting in a consecutive timeline of Afghanistan’s recent history displayed around the classroom.

Geography of Afghanistan: Divide the class into small groups and have each group study the two maps in the introductory pages of the text (of Afghanistan and of the region Kunar) and additional maps of Afghanistan that emphasize topographic features such as elevations and bodies of water. Based on their research, have each group create a map of Afghanistan that creatively displays Afghanistan’s major cities, provinces, and topography. The map could be three-dimensional, color-coded, or use another medium to portray the dramatic features of Afghanistan’s geography. Then, have each group present and display its map, along with an oral explanation of how they think the geography of Afghanistan has influenced the languages, ethnic tribes, and division of political power in Afghanistan.

Major Ethnic Groups of Afghanistan: Have students read Ahmed Shah Durrani’s poem in the beginning of the text and discuss how these words could apply to the feelings of an Afghan-American who is forced to live away from his homeland. Then, have students research the term “Pashtun” that appears in the poem’s last line and write an expository essay that explains the relationships between different ethnic groups in

Afghanistan. What is the position of Pashtun tribal groups in contemporary Afghanistan? What are the other major ethnic groups or federations of tribes in Afghanistan? To which ethnic group does Hyder's family belong? Karzai? How are these affiliations important in how the country "operates" or doesn't operate smoothly? How does tribal loyalty sometimes conflict with Afghanistan's national interests?

Languages of Afghanistan: Dari and Pashto are the two official languages of Afghanistan. Throughout Hyder's memoir, he italicizes words that are from these languages. (e.g., the Pashto word *mama* meaning maternal uncle on page 31). Have students research the differences between these languages --who uses them, how they differ, their written counterparts, etc.--and then create a glossary of the Dari and Pashto terms Hyder uses in the text. Each time students come across a Dari or Pashto term or phrase in their reading, have them add it to their glossary. After students finish compiling their glossaries, have them answer the following questions about Hyder's use of language in *Come Back to Afghanistan*: To which language does he refer more often in his memoir--Dari or Pashto--and why? Why do you think Hyder decided to keep particular words in their original language, as opposed to just substituting English words for them instead?

Traditional Afghan Dress: Hyder frequently refers to pieces of the typical Afghan dress, such as the kameez partoog, the pakol, the burka etc. Have students either draw or find images of these traditional Afghan articles of clothing for a poster that could hang on the classroom wall so their classmates can picture traditional Afghan clothing as they read Hyder's descriptions. Then, have students research the significance of these items in Afghan culture and share their findings when they present the illustrated posters.

The Origin of the Title: Students will learn in Chapter One that the title of Hyder's book *Come Back to Afghanistan* was inspired by a speech Karzai gave to a young predominately Afghan-American audience at Georgetown University in January of 2002. Have students read Georgetown University's newspaper's (*The Hoya's*) account of Karzai's address by visiting The Hoya's Web site: www.thehoya.com/news/012902/news2.cfm. Then, have students answer the question, "What was the significance of Karzai's speech to this particular audience?"

Hyder's Family Tree: Have students create a family tree based on the information they find on the "Characters" pages in the beginning of the text. Students may want to add to the family tree as they gain more information through their reading. (For example, they could add honorary members of Hyder's family (like Baba) who are not "blood relatives" but Hyder still considers as family.)

Reading Comprehension Questions by Chapter

Prologue:

- 1) The prologue establishes the circumstances of Hyder's presence in Afghanistan. Explain those circumstances. What is Hyder's father's role in Afghanistan in 2003? How is his father's role in Afghanistan radically different from his former life in the United States? Why did Hyder's family originally leave Afghanistan?
- 2) What is the setting of the Prologue? How do Hyder's descriptions of the airport foreshadow/indicate the state of Afghanistan in the year 2003?
- 3) How does Hyder describe his physical appearance in the prologue? How does he explain his self-identity, in relation to being an Afghan-American?

Part One

Chapter One

- 1) How does the setting of Chapter One differ from the Prologue's setting? What were Hyder's expectations of Afghanistan before he traveled there? On what did Hyder base these expectations? Did Hyder's first day in Afghanistan meet these expectations? Explain why or why not.
- 2) Chapter One is largely dedicated to Hyder's telling of his family's story. Summarize Hyder's family's story--beginning when they were forced to settle in Pakistan in 1979 and ending in Hyder's father's decision to return to Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban. Who is Abdul Haq? What was his role in Hyder's family history? How did the events of September 11, 2001 play a role in Hyder's family's story?
- 3) Why did Hyder feel compelled to follow his father to Afghanistan? Why did 'school seem increasingly irrelevant' during the months before Hyder left for Afghanistan?

Chapter Two

- 1) Who is Rauf Mama? Why did he meet Hyder at the airport in Peshawar? What did Hyder see in Rauf Mama's house that indicated he had "officially arrived" in Pakistan???
- 2) How did Hyder feel once he had crossed over into Afghanistan for the first time? Why do you think Hyder describes his feelings of entering Afghanistan and reuniting with his father as "anticlimactic"?

Chapter Three

- 1) What is the loya jirga? What kind of "welcoming" did Hyder hear for the loya jirga?
- 2) What is the Kalima? Why did Hyder's parents choose Abdul Haq to administer the Kalima for Hyder when he was an infant?
- 3) Why does Hyder compare his first trip to the presidential palace to "Lollapalooza"? What does this comparison reveal about Hyder's interests?

Chapter Four

- 1) In Chapter 4, Hyder describes his father's new position in Kunar. What is the position? What are Karzai's orders in regard to this new position? Why did Hyder's father accept this new position? What expectations fall on Hyder's father as a result of gaining this position?
- 2) Chapter Four contains a poem that expresses the Afghanis' hopes for the loya jirga. Interpret these hopes based on the poem. What are Sartor's expectations for the loya jirga? How do they differ from the ideals expressed in the poem?

Chapter Five

- 1) What is a loya jirga? Who speaks at the loya jirga? How did the audience react to the different speakers? According to Hyder, why do many people believe the loya jirga was

controlled by a foreign power? What announcements were made at the loya jirga? Which announcements were the most personally meaningful to Hyder?

2) How does Karzai open his speech at the loya jirga? According to Hyder, what does this invocation illustrate about the nature of Islam? According to Hyder, why won't Afghans consider removing the word "Islamic" from the new government's official name (the Islamic Government of Afghanistan)?

Chapter Six

1) Who was "Baba"? What was his significance to Hyder? What was his significance to Afghanistan? Why did Hyder feel obligated to attend Baba's funeral?

2) A large section of Chapter 6 is dedicated to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its effects on Hyder's family. How did Hyder's parents react to the Soviet attack of Kabul Radio? How do each of their reactions reveal their individual characters?

Chapter Seven

1) Who was Haji Qadir? How did his death affect Hyder's father's position in Afghanistan? Why does Hyder compare his father's new position to entering a new school during finals week? How do Hyder's perceptions of his father change as they view Haji Qadir's corpse?

2) In Chapter Seven, Hyder provides some background information about the Taliban. When the Taliban first emerged, what was known about them? Why does Hyder refer to the Taliban as "a kind of lost-boys' club"?

Chapter Eight

1) How does the lack of a communications infrastructure in Afghanistan affect Hyder's father's job as presidential spokesman? What barriers exist that prevent the central government's communication with all of Afghanistan?

2) In Chapter Eight, Hyder describes meeting some influential "players" such as news correspondent John Miller and former president of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani. How do these encounters influence the way Hyder sees himself and his role in Afghanistan?

Chapter Nine

1) In Chapter Nine, Hyder describes violent incidents that affected his father and himself personally in Afghanistan. What were these incidents? How does Hyder make a distinction between his reactions to tragic events in Afghanistan versus reporters' reactions to such events?

2) The last thing Hyder wanted to do before his return to the U.S. in 2002 was to visit Abdul Haq's grave. How does the image of Haq's grave demonstrate Hyder's point about Haq's place in history? Hyder believes that "History is written by those in power." How does this quote relate to Haq's position in recent Afghan history? Act if you are in the position to rewrite history from Hyder's point of view and write a brief encyclopedia entry for Abdul Haq.

Chapter Ten

1) How was Hyder treated in the Dubai airport as he was traveling back to California? How did this incident cause Hyder to reflect on his identity as an Afghan-American?

2) How does Hyder's mother react to his video coverage of the loya jirga? Why does she react in this manner? How did his mother's reaction make Hyder reflect differently on his summer experience in Afghanistan?

Part Two

Chapter Eleven

- 1) How did Hyder's father feel about his new position in Kunar, as opposed to his former position as presidential spokesman? How did Hyder romanticize Kunar based on the news stories he receives in the U.S. about Kunar? Why did Hyder's father object to a particular AP article he read about his new role in Kunar?
- 2) How have Hyder's experiences in Afghanistan led him to alter his future career plans? How has this change of plans influenced his personal reading? How do his plans relate to his interest in the computer game Civilization?

Chapter Twelve

- 1) How did Hyder expect Kunar to differ from Kabul? Why did he consider these expectations "intimidating"?
- 2) How was Hyder greeted when he landed in Afghanistan? How does this "homecoming" feel to Hyder?

Chapter Thirteen

- 1) How has Kabul changed since Hyder's last visit to Afghanistan? What does he notice about women in Kabul? How does Kunar describe the physical aspects of Kunar? How does he describe the social and cultural atmosphere of Kunar? How are all of these aspects of Kunar related to its position along the Pakistani border?
- 2) How is Hyder greeted at the governor's house in Kunar? How does Hyder contrast his childhood relationship with his father in the United States with his present relationship with his father in Kunar?

Chapter Fourteen

- 1) What problems did Hyder anticipate his father encountering due to his position as governor of Kunar? What other problems have surfaced in Kunar?
- 2) How did Hyder's visit to a mass grave in Kerala help him realize that the role of ex-Communists is "tricky" in Kunar? According to Hyder, how has the tragedy of Kerala been recorded by history? How does Hyder feel about this "coverage"?

Chapter Fifteen

- 1) How has his father's past prepared him for his present position in Kunar? How has his father been received by different factions in Kunar? How is his family's name "Said" interpreted by the residents of Kunar? How do the residents of Kunar perceive his clean-shaven face?
- 2) How are the effects of Hyder's father's work in Kunar immediately evident in Kunar? Give an example.

Chapter Sixteen

- 1) Why are American soldiers a noticeable presence in Kunar? Why is Hyder's father frustrated with the American forces in Kunar? What does U.S. General Vines suggest in regard to preventing Afghans from interacting with the Pakistani army?
- 2) In Hyder's opinion, what choice does America have regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Chapter Seventeen

- 1) In Chapter Seventeen, Hyder describes his trip to the remote village of Kurangal with Rauf Mama and American soldiers. Why do they take this trip? What do they learn from meeting with the tribesmen in Kurangal? Why are Hyder's skills as a translator needed in this meeting?
- 2) What forces are responsible for the communication breakdown that occurs between the American soldiers and the people of Kurangal? How does Shah Wali contribute to these

problems? What does Hyder mean when he writes “both sides speaking in code” in reference to the Americans’ meeting with the people of Kurangal?

Chapter Eighteen

1) In Chapter Eighteen, Hyder describes being under fire in an ambush on the way back to Kunar from Kurangal. How does Rauf Mama react to the ambush? How does Hyder? Why do they have different reactions? Why does Hyder consider the ambush as a “baptism” or an “initiation rite” for his life in Kunar? How did Hyder interpret his father’s reaction to news of the ambush?

Chapter Nineteen

1) Of what crime is Abdul Wali being accused? Why is Hyder sent to accompany Abdul Wali to see the American interrogators? How does a cultural misunderstanding about measuring time impede the Americans’ interrogation of Abdul Wali? Why does Hyder become uncomfortable translating for the Americans? How does Hyder feel about the interrogation techniques used by the Americans while they interrogate Abdul Wali?
2) What ultimately happened to Abdul Wali? Why is Hyder’s father opposed to the American autopsy of Abdul Wali’s body? How did Abdul Wali’s death “deal a blow” to both the U.S. forces and to Hyder’s father? What does Hyder eventually find out about Abdul Wali’s death? How does he gain this news?

Chapter Twenty

1) According to Hyder, why doesn’t the central government in Kabul lend more financial support to Kunar? Why did Afghanistan receive more international funding in the 1980’s than they have received recently? Describe the Afghan game show that Hyder sees on Afghan television. What does this game show illustrate about life in Kabul?
2) What conclusion does Hyder reach about the importance of President Bush to the U. S. as opposed to the importance of Karzai to Afghanistan? What does Karzai consider as the major successes of the transitional government in Afghanistan? The major obstacles?

Chapter Twenty-one

1) According to Hyder, how do teenagers live in Kunar?
2) How does Sartor react to an image of Jay-Z on television? What story does Sartor tell to illustrate what it was like living under the Taliban? According to Hyder, what do Westerners misunderstand about life in Afghanistan under the Taliban?

Chapter Twenty-two

1) According to Hyder, how do the hiking paths between Kunar and Pakistan endanger Kunar? Why do Hyder and Rauf Mama choose to hike into Pakistan instead of drive?
2) How does Hyder describe their journey? Why does the border crossing between Kunar and Pakistan make Hyder realize why Afghanistan is often referred to as the “graveyard of empires”?

Chapter Twenty-three

1) What do you think Rauf Mama represents to Hyder? Describe Rauf Mama’s life during the Soviet invasion and how it has changed during his present circumstances. According to Rauf Mama, how did the outnumbered mujahedeen win battles against the Russians?
2) During Hyder’s interview with Rauf Mama, Hyder asks him about the hardest moment in his life. How did he respond? How does hearing Rauf Mama’s stories affect Hyder’s feelings about his own work in Afghanistan?

Chapter Twenty-four

1) In Chapter Twenty-four, Hyder has returned to California to reflect on his experiences in Afghanistan. How does Hyder’s father see a change in Hyder as a result of his work in Afghanistan? What does Hyder’s father predict will be Hyder’s greatest difficulty in

Afghanistan in the future? Why does this particular challenge frustrate Hyder in California?

2) Why does Hyder make an unexpected trip back to Afghanistan? What “small changes” did Hyder and Omar notice upon their return to Afghanistan? What is an NGO? How did Hyder receive a lesson on corruption when he went to register his family’s NGO?

3) What does Hyder miss about America when he is in Afghanistan? What does Hyder miss about Afghanistan when he is in America?

4) What is a common misconception about Afghanistan’s population density that Hyder points out? How does this misconception relate to the prospect of Osama bin Laden hiding there? Why is Kunar featured on the cover of *Time* magazine and in other well-known American news magazines?

Part Three

Chapter Twenty-five

1) Part Three opens with a poem. Who is the narrator of the poem? What could this poem symbolize in regard to Afghanistan?

2) How did the prisoner abuse revelations change Hyder’s feelings about Abdul Wali’s death? What types of questions did the CIA want Hyder to answer in regard to Abdul Wali? Why did Abdul Wali’s father object to the proposal of an autopsy for his son?

Chapter Twenty-six

1) What does the investigation into Abdul Wali’s death conclude? According to Hyder’s father, how will this news will affect relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan?

2) Why does Hyder say there is a “disconnect between the capital and the countryside” in Afghanistan? Why do journalists sometimes refer to Karzai as “the mayor of Kabul”?

Chapter Twenty-seven

1) Chapter 27 focuses on the elections in Afghanistan. Why is Hyder registering to vote even though he won’t be in Afghanistan for the elections? How is registering to vote in Afghanistan proving to be a dangerous activity?

2) What does the story of Hyder’s mother’s life reveal about the evolution of women’s rights in Afghanistan? Why was adjusting to life in America difficult for Hyder’s mother?

Chapter Twenty-eight

1) Why are estimates of the eligible-voter population important to each region in Afghanistan? Why does Hyder’s father want to convince election workers to set up a registration site in Shulton?

2) Based on the people Hyder encountered in Shulton, how do many Afghans determine how they will vote? How do the elders in Shulton perceive the relationship between development and democracy?

Chapter Twenty-nine

1) What does Hyder believe about the Americans’ quick defeat of the Taliban?

2) What does Hyder’s father believe about his treatment by the Americans when he visited the American base? How have some of the American soldiers acted insensitively to the people of Kunar?

Chapter Thirty

1) Why does Hyder’s father feel that Kunar needs its own military force?

2) What type of mission does Hyder’s father plan for Hyder and the new troops? Why is the mission delayed? How does Hyder’s seeing the injured and dead soldiers from Kunar affect his feelings about his own situation?

Chapter Thirty-one

- 1) Why was Colonel Thomas impressed by Hyder's father's style of leadership? Why were Hyder and Rauf Mama impressed by Colonel Thomas's style of leadership?
- 2) Why did Hyder choose to turn off his minidisk recorder when he entered the town of Shal? Why does Hyder describe his exploration of Shal as having an "archaeological" feel?

Chapter Thirty-two

- 1) What observations do Hyder and his brother make about the site of Osama bin Laden's former home? What is bin Laden's connection to Tora Bora? How does the Afghan perspective on Tora Bora differ from the American perspective? How do the people of Tora Bora feel about Americans?
- 2) Why do you think Hyder chose Sartor as his subject for his final radio show interview? What aspect of Hyder's interview with Sartor surprised Hyder?

Epilogue

- 1) Why was Hyder detained upon his return to the San Francisco International Airport? What types of things did Hyder choose to bring back with him from Afghanistan and why did he choose these objects?
- 2) Once Hyder has returned to California he is forced to rely on various forms of media for Afghan news. What are his sources for news? What does he learn from these sources? Why did the United Nations report on Afghanistan 'hardly make the news at all'?
- 3) What is *shir soye*? Why does Hyder feel that this term can relate to his father, to Karzai, to the Americans, and to himself?

Post-Reading Activities:

Personal Connections:

Hyder explains that sometimes Afghan responses to simple questions regarding one's name and age can confuse westerners. For example, in Chapter 2, Hyder explains how Afghans are named. What would be your name if your family followed this tradition? And, in Chapter 19, Hyder explains how people in Kunar live without calendars and therefore do not give a numerical answer to the question, "How old are you?" Instead, they describe their age by referring to milestones such as the Soviet invasion or when they started growing a beard. Have students figure out what their names would be according to Afghan tradition and then have them chart their own age by current events, pop music, or by some other time marker. Then, have students introduce themselves to the class by presenting their new names and age descriptions.

At the end of Chapter 3, Hyder wrote that he 'often feels as if he were born a generation too late' since 'he missed both the jihad (against the Soviets) and the Joshua Tree tour.' Have students explain these references, then answer the question, "Do you sometimes feel as if you were born in the wrong generation because you would have liked to witness a historical event or an era in music? Explain."

Hyder brought recording equipment to Afghanistan for a public-radio program called *This American Life*. How do your students think this influenced his trip and his interactions with the people he met in Afghanistan? Have students take a small tape

recorder around for a day and document their observations and interview some of the people they encounter. Then, have students write about how this experience affected them. Students can respond to the following writing prompts, “What types of observations did you record? Did the recording process force you look at your surroundings in a different way? If so, how?”

In Chapter 9, Hyder describes his feelings when he hears Karzai speak, “At his words, I feel a little thrill. It’s a rare thing for someone my age to be genuinely inspired by a leader of any nation.” What qualities does Karzai possess that inspire Hyder? Write about a leader that has inspired you. What qualities does that leader possess? How are these qualities demonstrated? If you have not found contemporary leaders inspiring, write about why you think most teens are not inspired by their political leaders.

Does reading Hyder’s memoir make your students more curious about Afghanistan? Ask students to respond to the following writing prompts: “Would you want to visit the Afghanistan? Why or why not? Use details from the text to support your view. Hyder brought many books and CD’s with him to Afghanistan. If you were to visit Afghanistan, describe one book and one CD you would bring with you and the significance of each choice.”

Hyder’s Reading List:

As your students read *Come Back to Afghanistan*, they will notice that Hyder is an avid reader as well as a writer. Have students read one of the books on Hyder’s book list and write about how the contents of the book can relate to Hyder’s perceptions of Afghanistan or relate to Hyder’s desire to ‘create order in which society can flourish’ in Afghanistan.

- 1) Plato’s *Republic*
- 2) Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*
- 3) Machiavelli’s *The Prince*
- 4) Henry Kissinger’s *Diplomacy*
- 5) James Michener’s *Caravans*
- 6) Louis Dupree’s *Afghanistan*
- 7) Robert D. Kaplan’s *Soldiers of God*
- 8) Fareed Zakaria’s *The Future of Freedom*

Interdisciplinary Connections:

Economics: In Chapter Three, Hyder explains the inflated Afghan currency rate in 2002 (\$1= about 40,000 afghanis). Have students create a chart to illustrate how Afghan currency values have fluctuated throughout the last decade.

In Chapter 11, Hyder refers to a color-coded map of the world by GDP averages. What is GDP? Why was Afghanistan blank? Have students research the current GDP’s of ten countries including Afghanistan and then create a visual representation of their findings (pie chart, bar graph, etc.).

Journalism: Many of the events and topics about which Hyder writes have also been covered by Western or American journalists. Have students identify one such event (e.g., the loya jirga, the death of Abdul Wali, etc.) and find a Western newspaper article (or two) that reported the event. Then, have students write in response to the prompt, “How does the newspaper coverage differ from Hyder’s coverage in tone? Which description or coverage do you think is more objective? Which account captures your interest? Explain why.”

Mass Media: Hyder is dependent on many sources to find out current news about Afghanistan, when he is in the U.S. and even when he is in Afghanistan. He also expresses frustration about particular sources and their biases and/or inaccuracies. In Chapter 11, for instance, he describes how his father complains to an AP reporter about a false story about his being attacked in Kunar. Have students research how news services supply stories to news providers like newspapers, Web sites, radio, television, etc. Then, have students create a flow chart to show the possible paths that news takes from the point at which the event takes place to the point at which it reaches the public. Have students consider the potential flaws in this process.

Music: Hyder quotes several songs by the band U2 and chooses to bring many of their CD’s on his visits to Afghanistan. Have students listen to the lyrics of some of the songs he quoted (e.g., “Love Rescue Me”) and write a paper analyzing why Hyder relates the music of U2 to his experiences in Afghanistan. Have students use quotes from U2 song lyrics and from *Come Back to Afghanistan* to support their views in the essay.

Social Sciences:

In Chapter 27, Hyder writes about his mother. Have students consider what the story of Hyder’s mother’s life reveals about the evolution of women’s rights in Afghanistan. Then, have students write a research paper about how the current status of women’s rights in Afghanistan has changed since the Taliban lost power.

Have students research Afghanistan’s adjustment to democracy. Then, have students write a persuasive essay in response to the prompt, “Can democracy solve Afghanistan’s problems?” Students should include details from their research and from *Come Back to Afghanistan* to support their stance.

Technology: In Chapter 8, Hyder discusses how certain Afghans control the spread of information in certain regions of Afghanistan (e.g., Rashid Dostum controls the television spectrum in the north and Ismail Khan does so in the west). Have students research and write about how technology affects the spread of information in Afghanistan and how this relationship affects the power of its central government.