

**I finished this book before the class started. I could not put it down. I devoured every piece of culture and history it could give me. I did try to go back and break my reading into the amount of pages read at a time. I wanted to have the feel of keeping the reading log; however, I found it hard to reflect when I already knew the answers.

Date: June 2010 Title: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Pages: 3-12

Reading log: What were your feelings after reading the opening chapters?

I really felt sorry for Mariam. She is an innocent child. Her mother seems to blame her for her existence, she is hard and mean. Nana calls her by the fitly word *harami*. This word has great power, it controls the layout of Mariam's life, "It was the way Nana uttered the word—not so much saying it as spitting it at her—that made Mariam feel the full sting of it. She understood then what Nana meant, that a *harami* was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance."

If having multiple wives is a cultural norm, why didn't Jalil marry Mariam's mother?

Pedagogical reflection: Using this question as a starting point allows students to ease into the story. I know that the Afghan culture is foreign to me; it must be new to students as well. They only know what is reported in the media about the current war in Afghanistan and their notions about terrorists. Asking them to reflect on how they feel can open up the discussion about what they already think they know and what we learn in our cultural research and in the novel (written by a Native).

I could easily begin this way with any novel about a different way of life (*To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Scarlet Letter*).

Date: June 2010 Title: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Pages: 13-24

Reading log: What do you know now that you didn't know before?

For a while I really believed, or wanted to believe, that Jalil would come for her. But he held her for a "long, long time", that was a sign that he wasn't coming for her. Mariam reminds me of a Cinderella, hoping and wishing for, not Prince Charming this time, but a father.

Pedagogical Reflection: Ten pages is a little short to play this question. But it is a very good question as we continue reading. Ideally the students are reading for information about plot, character, setting, allusions, etc... As we continue to gather information the discussion grows. We can make more predictions, we can summarize what we know, and we can chart character connections.

Date: June 2010 Title: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Pages: 25-195

Reading log: Give three (3) reasons why this book should be taught to the whole class.

1. Marriage practices in this culture. Mariam's father married her off because she was a nuisance. 2. Cultural beliefs about women. Rasheed had strong beliefs about how she should dress in public, how his customers should control their wives when they were showing their feet, but he keeps Playboy in the drawer. Women were also not allowed in the room when men had company, and Rasheed treats her worse and worse after the loss of all the pregnancies. 3. Point of view. The story teller changes which affects the way the reader sees the story. Laila's view is very different from Mariam. Laila's family is a complete reversal. 4. The political situation in Afghanistan is very interesting. I had no idea that the communist rule was the better situation. The information on the war is important.

Pedagogical Reflection: All of these reasons and more are reason to teach this book. I would want students to answer this question if they are reading a book independent of the class. The reason for answering this question would be a metacognitive one, what are they learning that would benefit other people. This is a higher level activity.

Date: June 2010 Title: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Pages: 199-371

Reading Log: I was furious when...

1. Laila accepted Rasheed's marriage proposal

I totally get why Laila accepted the marriage proposal, she had to protect herself and her baby, but she risked her life with one little lie. I was frightened for her, having to sleep with Rasheed, trusting that Mariam wouldn't retaliate, and hoping Rasheed wouldn't figure it out. At the same time I admire her attempts to stand up to the man.

2. Tariq was not dead

It was not believable to bring this character back from the grave, nor was it fair. I'm a little concerned that the author is going for the fairy tale ending when the suffering was so much. It's too far fetched.

3. Mariam made the ultimate sacrifice

I cried for Mariam. She made the ultimate sacrifice. She died to make life better for her family. I was a little surprised that she would be the one to kill Rasheed. Laila had been so close so many times. But Mariam had to; she was the one to fix things. We can be proud of Mariam for taking control and not taking orders for the second time.

Pedagogical Response: This statement is relevant at this point because now students are having an emotional connection with the text. I want them to tell me what made them mad and why. Then I want them to tell me what the author was trying to do. This is an important step when they get closer to AP and college level literature.

Date: June 2010 Title: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Pages: 375-415

Reading log: What is the most important passage in the book?

Page 395: "'I'm sorry,' Laila says, marveling at how every Afghan story is marked by death and loss and unimaginable grief. And yet, she sees, people find a way to survive, to go on. Laila thinks of her own life and all that has happened to her, and she is

astonished that she too has survived, that she is alive and sitting in this taxi listening to this man's story.”

Pedagogical Response: My choice of important passage will create disagreement, but the discussion should be invaluable in the search for theme and author's purpose. In any book we are reading I would present this question before the end to give the students a chance to start looking through the book and paying attention to important details. This is a close reading activity.