A Thousand Splendid Suns
Study Guide

General Approach
As you read the novel, stop after reading each chapter and write a two (2) sentence summary of the chapter. If the chapter is titled, then write it down. If it has no title, then create one. This simple exercise will help you sense the flow of the novel.

Character List
For the following characters make note of on what page he/she first appears. It is often on that page that you find the description of the character.

Mariam  Jalil  Nana
Muhsin and Ramin  Bibi Jo  Mullah Faizullah
Afsoon  Nilofaur  Rasheed
Fariba  Hakim  Laila
Hasina  Giti  Ahmad and Noor
Tariq  Khadim  Aziza
Zalmai  Zaman  Salim
Sayeed  Hamza

Glossary of Terms
For the following terms you may want to look them up before you read. It will help you better understand the book as you read.

Ahmad Shah Massoud  Al-Qaeda  Allah
bath house  Buddahs of Bamiyan  burqa
Communist  daal  Dostum
Eid or Eid-ul-Fitr  fast  hashish
Hazaras  Hekmatyar  infidel
jihad  Islam  jinn
kolba  Koran or Qur'an  land mine
militia  Mohammad Najibullah  Mujihadeen
Mullah  Mullah Omar  Pashtuns
Ramadan  republic  Socialist
Soviet  Tajiks  Taliban
Author’s bio
Use the internet to create a mini biography of the author. This will help you better understand his/her intentions in writing the book.

Some Questions to consider
Use the following questions to better understand the themes and focus of the novel.

Describe the focus on legitimacy and illegitimacy in the novel. Include the stories of individual characters and the political climate in Afghanistan.

Mariam and Laila were brought together due to circumstances they could not control. Describe how and when both women were able to regain power over their own lives and who was essential for them to gain this personal power.

Nana tells Mariam that a man always finds a way to blame a woman. Discuss examples throughout the book in which Nana's statement rings true.

Many characters in the novel have troubled pasts. Discuss how these characters' past experiences affect their decisions and interactions.

Discuss how the positions held by women and the rights that they are afforded change in Afghanistan as the political environment changes.

Laila and Mariam have very different strengths and weaknesses. Discuss how they begin to learn from one another.