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Kim

Rudyard Kipling · *1901 · original English text*

Kimball O'Hara, a poor white boy gone native in Lahore, meets a Tibetan lama seeking a holy River and becomes his chela. At the same time the British secret service finds in him a tool for the Great Game. The book is a road of bazaars, hills, and schools, and a question asked more than once: Who is Kim?

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Is Kim the lama's disciple, a Sahib in the Game, or 'Little Friend of all the World'—and can a boy belong to all of these without being split?

"No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?"

Kim · Late in the book, when the question of his self returns with force

Kim loves the lama and serves him with a real devotion. He also loves the road, disguise, and the work Mahbub Ali and Colonel Creighton give him. St Xavier's would make him a Sahib; the hills and the search for the River pull the other way. The book lets him be many things at once, but it does not pretend the question goes away. 'Who is Kim?' is asked in a great and terrible world, and the answer is a person, not a side.

KEY CHARACTERS

Kimball O'Hara (Kim)
An Irish soldier's orphan, raised in the bazaars, disciple and spy, who keeps asking who he is.

Teshoo Lama
A Tibetan monk seeking the River that washes sin, whose love for Kim is the book's spiritual center.

Mahbub Ali
An Afghan horse-dealer in British intelligence, Kim's rough patron in the Game.

Colonel Creighton
The ethnologist-officer who schools Kim for survey and secret work.

Lurgan Sahib
The Simla dealer who tests and trains the boy's mind.

Hurree Chunder Mookerjee
A Babu of the service: learned, frightened, and effective in the hills.

WHO IS KIM?

> *"No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?"*
>
> **Kim** · Late in the book

> *"This is a great and terrible world. I never knew there were so many men alive in it."*
>
> **Kim** · On the road

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Zam-Zammah and the Lama

CHAPTERS I–III

Kim, sitting astride the old gun at Lahore, meets Teshoo Lama and takes the road as his chela. A message hidden in a toy sets the Game moving.

- The opening is a city and a friendship, not yet a spy story.
- Mahbub Ali, the horse-dealer, already uses the boy.
- The lama's search for the River of the Arrow is a spiritual plot that will not be a mere cover.

> *"Little Friend of all the World."*
>
> The name the bazaars give Kim, used throughout

02

The Road, and a Regiment

CHAPTERS IV–VI

They walk the Grand Trunk Road. Kim falls in with his father's old regiment, his parentage is proved, and the priests and soldiers claim him for a Sahib's schooling.

- The Road is Kipling's great panorama of India.
- The lama is nearly parted from the boy and will not easily yield him.
- A red bull on a green field was the prophecy; the flag makes it fact.

03

School and the Great Game

CHAPTERS VII–X

Kim is sent to St Xavier's. Holidays return him to Mahbub and to Lurgan Sahib, who trains his memory and his nerve for secret work.

- Creighton wants a chain-man and a reader of men.
- Lurgan's shop in Simla is a school of observation and of fear.
- The lama pays for the boy's education out of a holy man's purse.

04

The Hills

CHAPTERS XI–XIII

Kim, grown and commissioned, takes the road again with the lama toward the hills, carrying the Game and the pilgrimage together.

- Hurree Babu is comic and also very able.
- A Russian and a Frenchman in the high country bring the Game to violence.
- Kim's care for the lama in illness is the measure of his chela's vow.

05

The River, and 'Who is Kim?'

CHAPTERS XIV–XV

The lama's quest ends in a vision of the River. Kim, exhausted, comes back to himself with the old question still in his mouth, and the world still before him.

- The close honors both the Buddhist search and the boy's particular life.
- The Game has used him; it has not quite owned him.
- 'This is a great and terrible world' is said with wonder, not only with fear.

> *"This is a great and terrible world. I never knew there were so many men alive in it."*
>
> **Kim** · On the road, in the amazement of the crowd

Identity | Discipleship | The Great Game | A Great World | Loyalty

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #2226, in fifteen chapters. Kim is called "Little Friend of all the World" in the bazaars; use that epithet as the book does.
2. The identity speech is exact: "No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?"
3. Also exact: "This is a great and terrible world. I never knew there were so many men alive in it."
4. The lama's Buddhist quest is treated with respect in the book and should be in class. It is not a costume for the spy plot.
5. Kipling's India includes empire, caste talk, and the secret service. Read the Game as a political fact, and do not let it erase the lama's road.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #2226, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/kim/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.