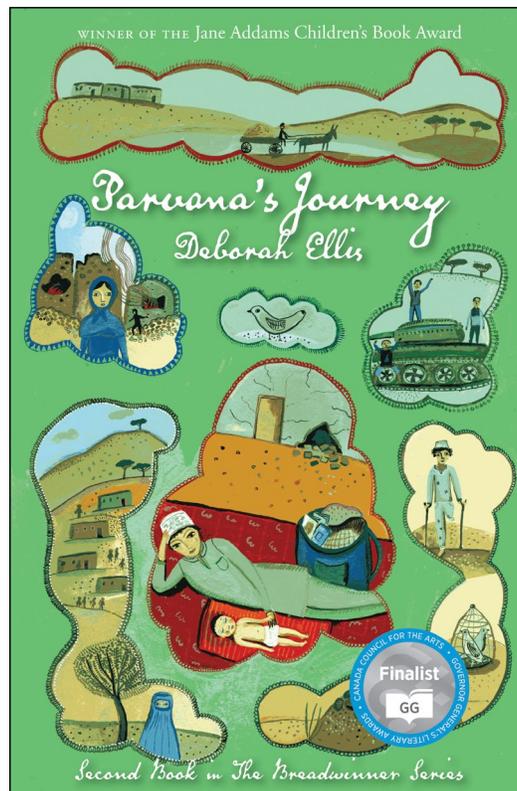




GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

Parvana's Journey

Written by Deborah Ellis



This gripping novel and sequel to the international bestseller *The Breadwinner* tells the story of Parvana's quest to find her family in Afghanistan.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Ages 10 to 14 / Grades 5 to 9

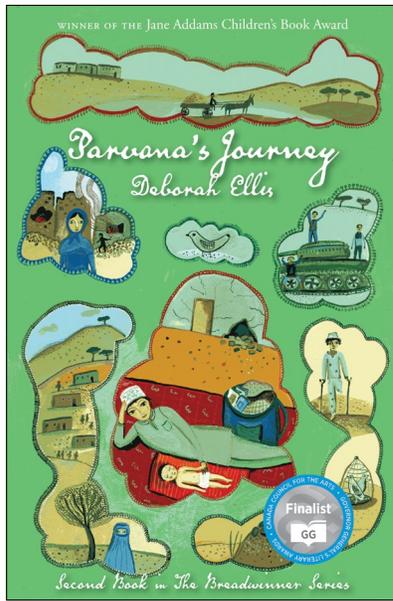
JUVENILE FICTION / People & Places / Middle East

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

A war is raging in Afghanistan as a coalition of Western forces tries to oust the Taliban by bombing the country. Parvana's father has died, and her mother, sister and brother have gone to a faraway wedding, not knowing what has happened to the father. Parvana doesn't know where they are. She just knows she has to find them.

She sets out alone, masquerading as a boy, her journey becoming more perilous as the bombs begin to fall. Making her way across the desolate Afghan countryside, she meets other children who are strays from the war — an infant boy in a bombed-out village, a nine-year-old girl who believes she has magical powers over land mines, and a boy with one leg who is so obnoxious that Parvana can hardly stand him. The children travel together because it is easier than being alone. And, as they forge their own family in the war zone that Afghanistan has become, their resilience, imagination and luck help them to survive.

The reissue includes a new cover and map, an updated author's note and a glossary to provide young readers with background and context. All royalties from the sale of this book will go to Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Parvana's Fund supports education projects for Afghan women and children.

GETTING STARTED

- Have students each research two facts about Afghanistan (e.g., languages, religion, population, area, capital, life expectancy, literacy rate, monetary unit, flag, geographical features, climate, historical information, art, architecture, music, media). Have volunteers compile the information for a “Quick Facts” sheet or a bulletin board display.
- Read the Author’s Note (pages 195–97), for background information and context.
- Provide information about the author, Deborah Ellis, from online interviews, videos and the About the Author section on the last page of *Parvana’s Journey*.
- Display a series of maps of Afghanistan and have students consider its geographical features such as its landlocked situation, bodies of water, regions, major cities and bordering countries. Have them discuss the effects of these features on the people who live there. Have them also figure out where it is relative to your latitudinal location, and its size compared with your province or state.
- Have students view photo essays or other collections of photographs of Afghanistan and have them discuss their responses with a partner or small group.
- If students have not read *The Breadwinner*, the first book in Deborah Ellis’s series, explain that *Parvana’s Journey* is the second in a series of four novels set in Afghanistan featuring Parvana and her family and friends. Read students the synopsis of *The Breadwinner*, found on the last page of *Parvana’s Journey*.

▣▣▣▣ See also the maps on page 9 of *Parvana’s Journey*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/WRITING

CHAPTER ONE

1. Who is Parvana and what do you learn about her in this chapter? Why do you think she is pretending to be a boy?
2. Where were Parvana and her father headed, and why were they going there? Why did they have to stop?
3. Reread the section about the Soviet tank (pages 18–19). Why do you think the author included it?
4. Why would Parvana carry her father's books on her journey? Why do you think they are called a "precious bundle" (page 13)?
5. Why does Parvana choose not to let the girl come with her on the journey? How do you think that decision makes Parvana feel?
6. What do you learn about the Taliban in this chapter?
7. Who does Parvana write to at the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER TWO

1. Imagine you were speaking to Parvana and her father about your own attitude toward school. What do you think they might say to you?
2. What do you think the father meant by the words "the world is our classroom" (page 23)? Think of some examples in your own life of how you use the world as your classroom.
3. Why do you think Parvana is, at first, so angry with the wailing woman? What is wrong with the wailing woman? What does this scene do for the book?

CHAPTER THREE

1. Where has Parvana arrived? What does she discover?
2. List five or six things that Parvana does in this chapter that make you admire her know-how. How many of those things would you be able to do?
3. The author writes, on page 35, “She could see no war in his sleeping face, or in the way his breathing made his little chest rise and fall.” What does this sentence mean to you?
4. Parvana is carrying a women’s magazine that her mother had written articles for. Why is it a secret magazine? What kind of articles do you think it might contain?

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Why has Parvana come to the cave?
2. How does Parvana manage to get Asif to come to the edge of the cave? What character traits does she show by doing this?
3. Why do you think Asif speaks to Parvana so rudely?
4. What do you predict will happen next? Do you think that Parvana will leave the baby and the boy behind?

CHAPTER FIVE

1. When Parvana sees the scars on Asif’s back, she thinks, “he really was chased by a monster”(page 60). What might she be thinking of?
2. Why do you think Parvana and Asif bicker so much?
3. Reread the final sentence in Parvana’s letter. Using the same sentence structure (“My life is ____ and ____ and ____ and ____ and long days of ____.”), write a sentence that describes your life. How does it compare with Parvana’s?

CHAPTER SIX

1. What do you think of the decision to dig for buried treasure? Did you think they would find anything?
2. What do you think of Parvana's thoughts on what she would do with the treasure (page 67)?
3. What is ironic about the last sentence in the chapter (page 70)?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. What are Parvana's reasons for moving on? How does Asif feel about leaving with her?
2. Why do you think Parvana writes letters to Shauzia? Do you think Shauzia will ever get them?
3. How is Parvana feeling about herself?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. In her letter, Parvana writes that she no longer believes in fairy stories, and asks what she should believe in now. What would you tell her?
2. Asif says, "Grownups shouldn't turn their backs on children" (page 88). How did adults fail the children in this chapter?

CHAPTER NINE

1. How does Parvana and Asif's relationship in this chapter differ from their usual behavior? How does this chapter make you feel?

CHAPTER TEN

1. Why are the children sick?
2. What caused the explosion? Why do you think Asif reacted the way he did when the land mine went off?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Describe Leila and where she lives.
2. Find examples of Leila's blunt, matter-of-fact manner. What does this trait tell you about her life?

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Where did Leila get all her "treasures" (page 114)?
2. What does Leila think is keeping her safe from the land mines?
3. Why does Asif call Parvana and Leila "dreamers" (page 115)? Do you agree with him? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. How does Asif and Leila's relationship affect Parvana?
2. How have things improved for the children?
3. Picture in your mind the image of the flowers (page 126). What would they provide for the children?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Why does the author describe the time in the Green Valley as "golden days" (page 135)? How are all the characters growing stronger? What is helping them heal and grow stronger?
2. How does the author make this chapter feel "lighter" than previous chapters?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Looking back on the chapter, how does the author give hints, or foreshadow, that something bad might happen?
2. Reread page 147. Examine the style the author uses to describe the horrific event (e.g., simple diction; short, simple sentences; repetition in the last three sentences). What effect does this style have on the reader?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. In her letter to Shauzia, what does Parvana say about her dreams and hopes? Do you think she should stop dreaming of her future? What would you say to her?
2. What do the children do with the book? How did you feel when you read this part?
3. How would you describe Parvana and Asif's relationship?
4. In your life, how well do you handle responsibility and being the leader of a group? How well do you think you would do if you were in Parvana's position? How must she be feeling?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. The children don't even know who is dropping the bombs, or why. What point do you think the author is making by including this fact?
2. What do we learn about what happened to Asif?
3. This chapter makes the point of how bombs and land mines devastate a country's landscape and natural resources, and the results of that loss on the people. How does the author make that point?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. Write a list of words that you think would describe the constant bombing and horror during this part of the children's journey.
2. Where do the children arrive? Do you predict that the children will be happy there?
3. Parvana says, "The part of me that's me is gone" (page 169). What do you think she means? How does Asif make her feel better?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. Why is Shauzia excited to talk to the nurse from France?
2. Compare your prediction of how the children would react to the camp with this chapter's description of their reaction.
3. What are the good things about the camp? What are the frustrating things about it?

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. What happens in this chapter? Were you surprised? Looking back, where is the irony in the tragic event?
2. Who does Parvana reunite with at the end of the chapter? Had you predicted that would happen? What do you think will happen next?
3. Why do most of the women stay inside the tents in the camp, and why is Parvana told to cover up?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. How is the ending of the book similar to the beginning?
2. Why is having a women's group and a school so important to the camp?
3. How is the exchange between Parvana and Asif the same but also different from their earlier exchanges?
4. What do you think will happen to Parvana and her family? What are your hopes for them?

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Choose from the following ideas to best suit your purposes and class needs.

Post a large sheet of kraft paper on a wall in the classroom as a “Graffiti Board” for students’ responses to the novel. Invite them to write their thoughts about the book, favorite quotations, sketches of characters and settings, new words they learned, what they want to know more about and questions they have about the book.

English Language Arts

Read aloud the author’s dedication on page 5 and this ironic description of Parvana from page 7: “She was ashamed of herself for getting caught up in a stupid dream, as though she were still a child.” Talk with students about the novel’s theme of children having to act as adults. Have students write about this theme, using three or more supporting examples from the novel.

English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; Social Studies

Ask students to choose two of the characters and study their relationship (i.e., Parvana and Asif, Parvana and Hassan, Parvana and Leila, or Asif and Hassan). Students can consider how the characters interact; how the relationship benefits the characters; what personality traits the relationship brings out in the characters and if and how the relationship changes throughout the novel. Students should support their study with specific examples from the novel. Have them write their findings in jot notes, an essay or a graphic organizer. Alternatively, they could write and perform monologues or work in pairs to role-play a scene with the two characters. They could improvise a new scene, or enact one, such as pages 32–40 with Parvana and Hassan; pages 46–50 or 71–74 with Parvana and Asif, and pages 131–32 or 140–41 with Parvana and Leila.

Drama; English Language Arts

Have students select a sentence, paragraph or whole chapter from the novel that they found particularly moving or striking. Ask them to select a song (with or without lyrics) that they think expresses the same emotion or feeling as that selection. Have them share and explain their selections and songs in small groups.

English Language Arts; Music

Ask students to identify what they think are the important themes in *Parvana's Journey* and create a collage or a diagram (such as a web or tree) to show those themes. Students might identify these themes: children having to act as adults; missing parents; definitions of family; the rights of children; the importance of literacy and education; the effects of war on children; human bravery and resilience in desperate times; refugeeism.

English Language Arts; Visual Arts

Talk with students about how few adults there are in the novel, and how the children had to play adult roles even when there were adults present. Ask students for examples from the novel. Then introduce the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. See [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) for information and photo essays, as well as the following site (or find a similar one), which provides a version of the Convention in child-friendly language: [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language](#)

Have students work in small groups to study the articles of the convention and identify those that the children in *Parvana's Journey* were denied. Have them create a presentation based on those articles (e.g., a dramatic reading of the articles with background music and images, a slideshow using presentation software, a reading or enactment of novel excerpts combined with a reading of the articles, a poster, a public service announcement, a web page design). You could arrange for each group to focus on one article, or the groups may wish to cover all of them.

Drama; English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; ICT; Music; Social Studies

Throughout the book, the author mentions simple games that the children play, such as string games and making a toy boat out of grass. She also includes the scene with the children playing on the Soviet tank (pages 18–19). Have students work in small groups to plan a kit of suitable toys/games/books for children in need. Have students create a list of criteria with you, for example: target age, ease of transport and no batteries. Students could present their plan using presentation software or an interactive whiteboard, if you have the equipment. English Language

Arts; Health and Life Skills; ICT

Ask students to skim the novel to help them recall scenes or images they found memorable. You might give them an example of your own, such as the burned-out orchard (page 165) or Leila shouting at the overhead planes (page 168). Have students select an image and represent it using their choice of the arts (e.g., drama, dance, poster, artwork, photography or video).

Drama; Dance; English Language Arts; Visual Arts

Collect and display a number of items to help students appreciate the difficulties of the journey. For example, provide a bag with items Parvana carries at the beginning (see page 13), and a sling with a bundle that is the weight of the baby Hassan to represent what Asif carries. Display the food as described on page 25: a bit of cooked rice, nan and dried mulberries, as well as the grass, leaves and a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that they were forced to eat later. Display some muddy water in a plastic bottle. Invite students to feel the weight of the load and to reflect on the meagre supplies of food and water, then write about their thoughts in the form of a poem, letter to one of the characters, artwork or a monologue.

English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; Visual Arts

Have students work in pairs to research a topic, using the web and other sources, to create a Fact-Finding Activity for another pair of students. Provide the topics, or have students brainstorm a list. You might wish to supply the list of websites for students to use, to ensure appropriateness for your class. Topic ideas are world hunger (statistics, aid organizations involved in alleviating hunger, related health issues); Afghan refugee camps; major events in Afghanistan's history; land mines in Afghanistan. Students identify the facts they think are most relevant to their chosen topic and create a list of questions based on those facts. The other pair then finds the answers to those questions, using the sources they are provided.

English Language Arts; Social Studies

One of the books Parvana carries on her journey is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Have a group of students read the book and report on it to the class, including suggestions about why the author might have chosen that particular book. Alternatively, or in addition, you might watch the movie as a class.

English Language Arts

Have students research aid organizations that provide support to Afghan citizens, including organizations created by Afghans. Students could work in pairs to research one organization and report their findings to the class. Following are organizations listed in *Kids of Kabul*.

English Language Arts; Social Studies

[Afghanistan Youth Center](#)

[Aschiana Foundation](#)

[Innovator Youth in Afghanistan](#)

[PARSA](#)

[Reza](#)

[Shuhada](#)

[SOLA](#)

[Women for Women](#)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Deborah Ellis is the author of the international bestseller *The Breadwinner*, which has been published in twenty-five languages. She has won the Governor General's Award, the Middle East Book Award, the Peter Pan Prize, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award. Recently named to the Order of Canada, Deborah has donated \$2 million in royalties to organizations such as Women for Women in Afghanistan, UNICEF and Street Kids International. She lives in Simcoe, Ontario.