

Study Guide for *My Name Is Parvana*

Note: Be sure to check all websites listed in this Study Guide to ensure suitability for your class.

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 199–201) 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 *My Name Is Parvana*.
- 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 three other books in the series, explain that *My Name Is Parvana* is a sequel to three previous books set in Afghanistan that feature Parvana and her friend Shauzia. Read students the synopses of *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana’s Journey* and *Mud City*, found on their back covers.

Questions for Discussion/Writing

Chapter One

1. What is the setting in this chapter? How does the author let the reader know about the setting and the characters without stating the information directly? Find all the details that inform the reader.
2. Why has Parvana been placed in this prison?

Sample websites for facts on Afghanistan:

[The Central Intelligence Agency / The World Factbook](#)

[Compton’s Britannica](#)

[The Beacon of Hope for Afghan Children Society](#)

[Afghanistan: The Harrison Forman Collection](#)

[Women for Women: Afghanistan](#)

For information about the author, Deborah Ellis, see:

[The Power of One Voice: An Interview with Deborah Ellis](#)

[Deborah Ellis Profile](#)

[Video Clip: Deborah Ellis Reads at Who Will Speak for the Child](#)

[Video Clip: Deborah Ellis interviewed by Shannon Skinner on Extraordinary Women TV](#)

See also the maps on pages 8–9 of *My Name Is Parvana*.

For a collection of photos, see:

[Afghanistan Image Gallery](#)

[Hell of a Nation: Photo Essay](#)

Have students begin a character profile of Parvana, or add to it if they have already created one for *The Breadwinner* or *Parvana’s Journey*. Explain that many of the characters who will appear in this book also appear in other books in the series: *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana’s Journey* and *Mud City*. Students can begin or add to their character profiles throughout the entire series.

3. What was Parvana carrying with her when she was found? What can you tell about her from the items she carried?
4. Why do you think Parvana is refusing to say anything? What does that say about her character?

Chapter Two

1. Describe the cell that Parvana is in.
2. What is a shalwar kameez? What does Parvana's red shalwar kameez mean to her?
3. What are the stories Parvana has heard about the prison?
4. Why does Parvana not want to end up like the peddler?
5. What do you think the author means by "Did a word like revenge have any real meaning in a country like Afghanistan" (page 25)? (For more information, read the Author's Note on pages 199–201.) How does the author establish the theme of invasion in this chapter?

Chapter Three

1. Why does Parvana do multiplication tables in her mind? What else does she do to keep focused?
2. What people in Parvana's life does this chapter introduce us to? How does the author do this in a compact way?

Chapter Four

1. Where is this chapter set (time and place)? What is the event that this chapter describes? How does Parvana feel at this time?
2. What family members and friends do we learn more about in this chapter? What do we learn about each one?
3. One of the men at the school's opening ceremony voices strong objections about the school. Why is he so against it?
4. Parvana speaks to a man from France. What does she ask him about?

The book *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of her father's precious books that Parvana rescues in *The Breadwinner* and carries with her in *Parvana's Journey*. During a time of extreme hunger in *Parvana's Journey*, she and the children chew on pages from the book (page 156).

On page 23, Parvana thinks about her special red shalwar kameez, which is a recurring image and symbol in the series. See *The Breadwinner* (pages 24 and 69) and *Parvana's Journey* (page 67).

The issue of mental illness and people "losing their minds" occurs throughout the series. Read about the mother's depression in chapter four of *The Breadwinner*, and also read *Parvana's Journey* (pages 27–29) and *Mud City* (pages 89–90). See also "Fareeba, 12" (page 64) in *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-ending War* by Deborah Ellis for an account of a girl with an intellectual disability.

See page 23 in *Parvana's Journey* to read about how Parvana recited multiplication tables when walking through the hills, and how she learned the importance of keeping her mind occupied from her father.

Remind students that the characters mentioned are family members and friends who appear in the three previous books in the series. Shauzia is Parvana's friend and the main character in *Mud City*. In *Parvana's Journey*, Parvana writes many letters to her, and we learn that these are the papers that the soldiers have found. They are revisited in chapter eleven.

Parvana's family members are characters introduced in *The Breadwinner*. Asif, Hassan and Leila are characters from *Parvana's Journey*. In that novel, Leila is killed by a land mine, and this school has been built in her name. Parvana's friend Shauzia appears throughout the whole series and is the protagonist of *Mud City*.

Shauzia's dream of seeing the lavender fields in France is a recurring theme throughout the series. See pages 125–26 of *The Breadwinner*, page 173 of *Parvana's Journey* and pages 23, 27, 119, 158 of *Mud City*.

Chapters Five and Six

1. What is the setting of chapter five? Of chapter six? What pattern are you noticing in the novel's structure? What do you think of this structure? How could you incorporate it in your own writing?
2. Why have the soldiers kept Parvana standing for so long? What do you think that might feel like? What information do they want from her?
3. In chapter six, why is Parvana feeling so dissatisfied? Why does she think about disguising herself as a boy and leaving?
4. Why are the men in the village so angry with Parvana?
5. "She was about to choose her future" (page 68). What were her choices? Describe a time you made a very important choice in your life.

Chapters Seven and Eight

1. "Her school was gone" (page 75). What do you predict has happened to it?
2. What do Parvana's thoughts and actions in the cell show you about her character?
3. What more do we learn about the support the school offers to girls and women?
4. How does the author give chapter eight a different tone than previous chapters?

Chapter Nine

1. Study the diction (the author's choice of words) in this chapter. How does it help to create a picture of Parvana's experience in the prison? How does the tone of this chapter differ from the preceding one? Why does it differ?
2. Why is Parvana being treated this way? What does she do to endure it?
3. Describe the train of thoughts Parvana has about torture. What do you think of the thoughts she has?

Chapter Ten

1. What is the letter that Nooria receives?

In *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey*, Parvana cuts her hair and dresses as a boy; it is the only way she can have the freedom to earn money and walk about freely.

See "Faranoz, 14" (page 14) in *Kids of Kabul* for an account of a school like the one in this novel. See "Aman, 16" (page 25), "Shabona, 14" (page 56), "Shyah, 14" (page 67) and "Mustala, 13" (page 43) for other accounts about the importance of education in Afghanistan.

In *The Breadwinner*, Parvana and Nooria's fractious relationship is a main subject, and sometimes a source of humor but also of unhappiness.

See "Angela, 17" (page 89) in *Kids of Kabul* for an account of a Youth Exchange and Study Program that was established in 2004 in the United States. To read and hear about what happened to the program, see [U.S. Quietly Halts Scholarship for Afghan Students](#)

2. Why is Parvana so angry with her sister? What do you think of Nooria?
3. What is the second letter? Who do you think threw it?

Chapters Eleven and Twelve

1. What are the corporal and major reading, and why? How would you feel if someone read your private journal or letters?
2. How does the major misinterpret what Parvana wrote?
3. How does Parvana show her bravery in chapter twelve? What does she see herself “rallying people” for (page 105)?
4. Why does Parvana see the world outside the compound as so unsafe? Who has created the “forest of hatred” (page 106)?

Chapter Thirteen

1. Why is the major’s statement, “We are in the Peace Business” (page 110), ironic in this chapter?
2. What happens during the interrogation? What does Parvana do?
3. Are you surprised that Parvana stops to save the woman? Explain why or why not.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

1. How has Parvana’s attitude toward school changed over time? What is her new role in the school?
2. What do you think is “something different about Ava” (page 124)? What clues does the author give us about her?
3. What character traits do Parvana and her mother share? Find examples to support your ideas.

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen

1. How did the scene with the crying soldier make you feel? What do you think of Parvana’s response to the soldier? Why do you think the author included this scene?

Parvana’s letters to Shauzia appear throughout *Parvana’s Journey*. The first three excerpts are from that novel; the last two letters in this chapter are new.

The story of Malali first appears in *The Breadwinner* (pages 27–29).

Parvana’s compassion for Ava is similar to her care for the baby, Hassan, in *Parvana’s Journey* (see chapter three). For an account of an Afghan girl with an intellectual disability, and a brief report on treatment of people with mental illness, see “Fareeba, 12” in *Kids of Kabul* (page 64).

2. “Something reached what she had tried so hard to hide” (page 133). What had she been trying to hide? What reached her?
3. What do you think of the way Parvana’s mother treats her? How does chapter seventeen reinforce Parvana’s feeling of loneliness?
4. What do you think the men put in the storage shed?

Chapter Eighteen

1. Whose idea was it to have the festival, and what was the intent? What events have you taken part in that were similar to the festival?
2. What were the high points for Parvana in this chapter? The low points?

Chapter Nineteen

1. What clues does the author give about what happened to the school? Why does the army think the attack happened?
2. Who do you think the woman who was tortured to death might be?

Chapter Twenty

1. Badria’s attitude and state of success represent hope. What incidents in the rest of the chapter create a sense of foreboding?
2. Where do you think the mother is?

Chapter Twenty-One

1. How does Parvana show leadership in this chapter? What do you think of how she handles things?
2. Why do the police and the old man come to the school? What does the old man threaten to do?
3. What do we learn in this chapter that begins to explain why Parvana is in prison?
4. What do you think has happened to the mother?

Scenes with the “Window Woman” occur throughout *The Breadwinner*. See, for example, pages 82, 93, 133–134 and 161–63.

On page 135, Parvana thinks about how her mother and siblings left Kabul while the father was still in prison. They left to take Nooria to be married in another city, and Parvana did not think they should leave. She stayed in Kabul with Mrs. Weera. See pages 135–38 of *The Breadwinner*.

The scenes between Parvana and Asif recall similar ones they shared in *Parvana’s Journey*. The book is about Parvana’s quest to find her mother. See pages 71, 122–23 and 131. See page 92 for the scene of the two of them singing.

See “Anonymous girl, 14” (page 124) in *Kids of Kabul*, for an account of a forced child marriage.

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. What happened to the mother? Were you correct in your prediction?
2. How does the author reveal the news that the mother is dead? How is it an effective way to present the information?

Chapter Twenty-Three

1. Parvana does the bravest thing she can think of: she tells Nooria to stay in New York and asks if Maryam can join her. Why is that brave?
2. Why is it hard for Parvana and Asif to know who actually owns the weapons stashed in the shed? What does Asif plan to do with them?
3. The chapter ends with humor in its description of Mrs. Weera. What do you think she is like? What might she do to help?
4. When you are reading this book, how are you able to tell which setting the chapters take place in? What do you look for?

Chapters Twenty-Four and Twenty-Five

1. What happened to the school? How do you think the major knew about the buried weapons?
2. “Why did you blow up your own school?” (page 175). Why do you think this was the one question that Parvana decided to respond to?
3. In chapter twenty-five, how does Asif help Parvana feel less defeated? Why do you think the children are so eager to learn, even after their great loss of the mother?

Chapter Twenty-Six

1. Parvana, Asif and the children face serious dangers. What are they?
2. Who shows up at the gate? How does the author make the entrance exciting and suspenseful?

See “Karima, 14” (page 29) for an account of violence toward women and also “Zuhal, 13” (page 71) for a description of a women’s garden and safe haven in Kabul. Both are in *Kids of Kabul*.

The formidable and courageous Mrs. Weera serves as a role model throughout the series and is first introduced on pages 56–62 in *The Breadwinner*. At the end of *The Breadwinner*, she goes to Pakistan to help in the refugee camps by running secret schools, clinics and a magazine. At the end of *Mud City*, she returns to Afghanistan with nurses to set up clinics.

Green Valley, mentioned on page 177, is a place in *Parvana’s Journey* where she and Asif, Leila and Hassan had a brief reprieve from hunger and fear. See pages 117–147. It did not last, and Parvana is feeling that now the school has been ruined, just as Green Valley was.

Shauzia’s disguise recalls *The Breadwinner*, which is about Shauzia and Parvana’s younger days together in Kabul. They disguised themselves as boys so they could work and walk freely in the streets. The reference to the Eiffel Tower refers to their promise to meet in Paris in twenty years’ time.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

1. What would have happened to the children if they had not left when they did?
2. What kind of place do the children come to? What is the atmosphere there?
3. We learn that it was Shauzia who had told Parvana to “say nothing ... not a word” (page 191) if she were captured. What do you think of her advice?
4. Why does Parvana feel compelled to return to the ruins of the school? What would you have told her to do? What happens to her when she gets there?

See “Sukina, 15” (page 101) in *Kids of Kabul* for the story of a young girl who had a similar experience to that of Kinnah and escaped to a women’s shelter.

Read or revisit page 32 of *The Breadwinner* for an account of Parvana’s brave action to stop the Taliban from finding the family’s hidden books. In *Parvana’s Journey* she still carries some of her father’s precious books and her notebook, even when the trek is arduous (see pages 43–44, 149).

See “Shaharazad, 12” (page 116) in *Kids of Kabul* for an account by the daughter of an Afghan woman in parliament.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

1. How is Parvana able to go free?
2. What do Parvana and Shauzia decide to do? Does their decision surprise you? What would you have done?
3. What do you think of the last paragraph of the book?

Activity Ideas

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

- Have students create a poster divided into four sections to represent (1) setting (2) characters (3) a quotation from the novel that summarizes what the novel means to you (4) something that the novel makes you want to know more about. Students can use both words and pictures to express their ideas. [English Language Arts](#)
- To explore character traits, have students create a two-column “Actions and Adjectives” chart for one or more characters in the novel. In one column they write a character’s actions or dialogue and in the other column they write adjectives describing the trait that the actions or dialogue demonstrate. [English Language Arts](#)
- Have students write a found poem using words and phrases from the book. Have them first brainstorm ideas for a theme. They then skim the novel to select the words and arrange them to create a poem. They could include an illustration if they wish. [English Language Arts](#)
- Ask students to imagine that Parvana is receiving an award for her work in helping Afghan women and children. Students write the acceptance speech she might give. [English Language Arts](#)
- Explore the author’s style and techniques by having small groups of students each search the novel for a different area of focus. Examples include humor, irony, simplicity and directness of language, suspense, metaphors and symbolism, references that audiences can relate to and effective dialogue. [English Language Arts](#)

- Have students work in groups to draw a floor plan or make a model of the school, using details from the book. Have them include another room or feature for a program or resource that they think would benefit the students. Also have them write a description of the school and why it is of such importance to Afghan girls and women. [English Language Arts; Social Studies](#)
- Ask students to work in pairs to explore Parvana’s relationship with her mother. They could present their findings through an enacted scene from the novel or an improvised scene (with a written introduction), an exchange of emails, monologues, an essay or a letter to an advice column. [English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills](#)
- “She could not remember a time when she did not believe she was on the edge of disaster ... she was never, ever sure that the future would not be terrifying” (page 159). Ask students to find and discuss other sentences or passages that emphasize the struggles that nobody, let alone a child, should have to face. Have them also discuss ways that people in this position can be helped. [English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; Social Studies](#)
- Ask students to work in groups to research people and organizations that work to improve the lives of Afghan citizens. They can post written reports and include photos to create a Wall of Achievement (see page 42). Be sure to check the websites first to ensure suitability for your class. [English Language Arts; Social Studies](#)

[Afghanistan Youth Center](#)

[Afghan Youth Initiative](#)

[Aina](#)

[Aschiana Foundation](#)

[PARSA](#)

[Shuhada](#)

[SOLA](#)

[Women for Women](#)

- Parvana jokingly says that the only thing she would ever torture someone for is the answer to “Where is the key to the library?” (page 84). Talk with students about the novel’s theme of the importance of reading, and invite them to find other examples in the book that support the theme. Have them plan and create a multimedia campaign they could present to the school to encourage people to read and to not take literacy for granted. [English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; ICT; Social Studies](#)
- Organize groups of students to research historical and political events that the novel introduces, (e.g., the Taliban takeover in 1996; the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S.; the invasion of Afghanistan after September 11; the ongoing fighting among regional groups in Afghanistan; withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan). Have students present their findings in an oral report or in podcast form. [English Language Arts; ICT; Social Studies](#)