

# Study Guide for *Parvana's Journey*

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 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*.

## 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?

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 the maps on pages 6–7 of the book, and encourage students to refer to them as they encounter place names during their reading.

For a collection of photos, see:

[Afghanistan Image Gallery](#)

For a photo essay, see:

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

Have students begin a character profile (or add to it if they have already created one for *The Breadwinner*). Explain that many of the characters also appear in the three other books in the series: *The Breadwinner*, *Mud City* and *My Name Is Parvana*. Students can add to their character profiles throughout the entire series.

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?

Read or revisit page 32 of *The Breadwinner* for an account of Parvana’s brave action to stop the Taliban from finding the hidden books.

The issue of mental illness and depression recurs throughout the series. For example, read about the mother’s depression in chapter four of *The Breadwinner* (pages 44–53), and see *My Name Is Parvana* (page 25). For an account of an Afghan girl with an intellectual disability, see “Fareeba, 12” (page 64) in *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-ending War* by Deborah Ellis.

Refer to pages 57 and 164 in *The Breadwinner* to read about how the women’s magazine began. See also the Aina website [AINA](#) for information about an organization that provides writing, photojournalism, and reading training for Afghan children.

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?

For an account of a girl living in an orphanage in Afghanistan, see "Miriam, 14" (page 120) in *Kids of Kabul*. For information on programs providing aid to orphaned children, see:

[PARSA Discovering the Afghan Spirit](#)

[RAWA Afghan Orphans Reshape their Lives at RAWA Orphanages](#)

[Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan](#)

Note that Parvana and Asif's relationship echoes that of Parvana and her sister Nooria in *The Breadwinner*. You might discuss the similarities, and also how these relationships lend humor and authenticity to the novels.

Parvana thinks about her special red shalwar kameez (page 67), which is a recurring image in the series. See *The Breadwinner* (pages 24 and 69), and *My Name Is Parvana* (page 23), for more about what the red shalwar kameez symbolizes for Parvana.

The interaction between Parvana and Asif (pages 72–74) becomes a pattern throughout this novel (pages 116–17, 142 and 192–93), and it arises again in *My Name Is Parvana* (page 48).

The letters to Shauzia reappear in *My Name Is Parvana* (pages 96–99), and play an important part in the plot, as they are read and misinterpreted by her captors.

## 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?

See the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child, [Conventions on the Rights of the Child](#). The site includes two photos essays. See also a version written in child-friendly language, [UN Convention on the Rights of a Child](#)

For information about health issues and contaminated water, see: [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene](#)

For a report on Afghanistan’s water resources and pollution, see: [Afghanistan’s Water Resources and Pollution](#)

- Picture in your mind the image of the flowers (page 126). What would they provide for the children?

## Chapter Fourteen

- 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?
- How does the author make this chapter feel “lighter” than previous chapters?

## Chapter Fifteen

- Looking back on the chapter, how does the author give hints, or foreshadow, that something bad might happen?
- 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

- 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?
- What do the children do with the book? How did you feel when you read this part?
- How would you describe Parvana and Asif’s relationship?
- 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

- 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?
- What do we learn about what happened to Asif?

Flowers are a recurring symbol in *The Breadwinner*. Read about the reference to planting flowers in the Kabul marketplace on pages 161–63 of that novel.

The image of the grandmother’s face lifted to the healing sun, on page 135, is an echo of similar images in *The Breadwinner* (pages 36, 74 and 90).

For information on children’s hunger and malnutrition, see: [2012 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics](#)

[Afghanistan: WFP Recovery and Emergency Interventions Support Flood-Affected Communities](#)

To read about Parvana’s experience being bombed in Kabul, and the author’s description of the war in Afghanistan in those years, see *The Breadwinner* (pages 13–14). See also the Author’s Note in *Parvana’s Journey* (pages 195–97).

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?

See "Shazad, 10" (page 107) in *Kids of Kabul* for an account of a camp for Afghan internally displaced persons (IDP).

Key in "Afghanistan" at this website about IDP: [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#)

See [2012 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Afghanistan](#) for information from the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR.

Read Shauzia's dream of the lavender fields in France in *The Breadwinner* (pages 125–26). The dream continues in *Mud City* (page 27), and a reference to Shauzia and Parvana's promise to meet in Paris concludes *My Name Is Parvana* (page 197).

To read about women's rights in Afghanistan, see: "Sara, 17" (page 112) in *Kids of Kabul*. See also the Women for Women site, [Women for Women International](#)

The importance of schools and literacy is revisited throughout the series. See *The Breadwinner* (pages 101–02, 132) and *Mud City* (pages 9, 123–24). *My Name Is Parvana* is largely about the school that Parvana, her mother and Asif have established.

See also "Faranoz, 14," (page 14), "Aman, 16," (page 25), "Mustala, 13" (page 43) and "Sigrullah, 14" (page 129) in *Kids of Kabul* for accounts about the importance of schools.

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](#)

[Afghan Youth Initiative](#)

[Aina](#)

[Aschiana Foundation](#)

[PARSA](#)

[Shuhada](#)

[SOLA](#)

[Women for Women](#)