



The Breadwinner

by Deborah Ellis.

NOVEL STUDY

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SUMMARY

Once her father is sent to jail, 11-year-old Parvana must find the courage to break Taliban law to save her family. 'The Breadwinner' is the story of a girl who must risk herself so her mother and sisters can survive life in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

This story brings to life a lot of reporting about wars which children may currently be hearing in the news. The experiences may not be relatable to the children in our schools however it is a vital to understand the issues which other children are facing all over the world. How these children have the same feelings however experience them through completely different challenge. It offers up the opportunity to see bravery and hope in what seems the darkest of times.

The book has 15 chapters, each between 9-14 pages long.

CHARACTER REVIEW

- **Parvana:** The eleven-year-old heroine of *The Breadwinner*, risks her own life to help her family, even though she just wants to be a normal kid.
- **Father:** Parvana's dad, and a former teacher. He's intelligent and foreign-educated, which leads to his arrest. Parvana takes courage from his stories.
- **Mother:** Also university educated, but is no longer allowed to work. She's seen her share of hardship, losing both her son to a landmine and her husband to prison.
- **Nooria:** Parvana's older sister.
- **Mrs. Weera:** A former teacher and women's rights activist; she's also Mother's friend. She has lost her whole family to the war except her granddaughter.
- **Shauzia:** A former schoolmate of Parvana's, who's also forced to help support her family. She has one goal: to escape Afghanistan and the Taliban.

SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK

- Conflict
- Problem solving
- Feelings review: worried, scared/afraid, proud, anger, misery, embarrassment, horror, sad, nervous, devastated, hopeful

STUDY QUESTIONS

Introduction

Before beginning the book, look at maps of Afghanistan and surrounding areas. **What do you think life is like here? How similar or different?** Look at Kabul where the main characters live. Look at the climate. Look at pictures online of the area. **Is this what you imagined this area to look like? Have you heard of these areas before? What did you know?**

Chapter 1

- **Parvana thinks about a time before the Taliban when the family were out walking and laughing. Their lives have changed since then. What rules have you guessed the Taliban have put in so far? Why do you think the Taliban made new rules? Are rules usually fair? Do you think these rules are fair? Why/why not?** *Refer back to lesson on rules (or Alfie learns a lesson in P5) – following the rules keeps us safe, keeps us out of trouble, Explore the concept that rules are a very important part of everyone’s life. These rules however, are not for the benefit of everyone. Not everyone is keeping the rules as the Taliban have their own rules. These rules were suddenly changed on the opinions of this group.*
- **Parvana and her sister Nooria have different feelings when they are first told they cannot go to school anymore.** (Parvana is happy to have a break, Nooria is very upset – as Nooria is older she has a greater understanding about what is happening and that they won’t be returning, they won’t see their friends etc). **How would you feel? Do you think their feelings changed?** (Parvana now wants to go back to school, she misses learning new things and her friends and teachers) **Why?**
- **What do you think about the relationship between Nooria and Parvana? Why do you think it is this way?**

Chapter 2

- **Parvana had a number of different feelings about going to fetch the water (resentful and proud). Can you have two feelings at once? Can you have an uncomfortable and comfortable feeling at the same time? Think of a time that you had two feelings at once. When was it? What happened?**
- **Parvana seen other people live nearby, but her father told her not to trust them, not even her neighbors. Is this similar or different to us?** We may know our neighbors and even go into some of the houses on our street. **What happens if we see someone in our street that we don’t know?** Discuss stranger danger.
- **You find out that the family had another son, an older brother, Hossain, who died when he was 14 because of a land mine. How do you think this affects the family? Do they talk about him? Why/why not?** *(Mother and Father find it painful. Nooria and Parvana find it comforting, they like to remember him and hear new stories about him)*
- **‘The whole family was laughing when four Taliban soldiers burst through the door’ How does this sentence make you feel? How do you think the family felt when this happened? How did their feelings change?**
- **‘Take care of the others my Malali’ What did Father mean by this?**
- **What sort of a person do you think the Faun is? Do you think he can be trusted?**



Activity

Problem-Solving Activity – The family are faced with a huge problem (the only man in the home, Father, has been taken by the Taliban). **In co-operative learning groups, identify the problem, how they would be feeling, decide on a goal, think of 3 possible solutions** (e.g. they go to find father, they leave the area), **think about the consequences of each one, choose the best solution and make a plan as a whole class that you think they should try out.**

If time permits - role-play this in your group.

- **Art–** Draw the family in their home after Father has been taken by the Taliban. Show their feelings through facial expressions.

Chapter 3

- **How do you think Parvana felt when her mother said they were going to get her father out of jail?**
- **Why do you think Parvana’s mum didn’t want a note even though it might get her in trouble? Was she wrong for not following the rules?**
- **Activity: Writing Prompt** - Try to predict what you think is going to happen in the rest of this story based on how the chapter has ended

Chapter 4

- **Why do you think Parvana and her mum didn’t realise their feet hurt so bad until they got home?** (focus, pain, other thoughts occupying their mind, determinations)
- **Do you think Parvanas mum didn’t want to write? Why doesn’t she write anymore?**
- **How do you think the rest of the family felt when Mother didn’t get up off the toshak or act as normal?** (upset, worried, falling apart) **How did mother feel?** (lost, panicked, scared for her family, how they will survive without father) **Do you think there was anything that could help mother and how she feels?**

Literacy- write a short journal entry that Parvana might have written during this time when her and mother returned from trying to find father and the following days where mother was unable to get out of the toshak

Activity - Problem-Solving Activity – The family are faced with a huge problem (they have ran out of food and father isn’t there to make money/go outside). **In co-operative learning groups, identify the problem, how Parvana/other family members would be feeling, decide on a goal, think of 3 possible solutions** (e.g. find another family member/friend to accompany them outside), **think about the consequences of each one, choose the best solution and make a plan as a whole class that you think they should try out.**

Chapter 5

- **Parvana has bumped into someone she used to know before the Taliban took over, Mrs Weera. Do you think she is trustworthy? What is trust? Why do you think she can/ can not be trusted?**
- **Why was Nooria so relieved to see Mrs Weera?**



(someone they knew was still alive, it gave her hope, she felt like Mrs Weera would be able to support her mum, she felt happy to see another grown up who would be able to take control where their mum wasn't currently able to)

Activity – Literacy/Art

Headlines

Mrs Weera discussed needing Mother to help with a newspaper. What do you think this newspaper would be about? Discuss.

Can you create the front page of the newspaper including headlines, images etc to ensure the correct message is getting across to those outside of the Taliban rule?

Chapter 6

- How do you think Parvana felt when she heard the family plans to turn her into a boy? Do you think she was happy about it?
- Why was she worried about cutting her hair off? Why did it mean so much to her? How would you feel if you were asked to let go of your identity and change into someone else?
- Why did mother whisper “goodnight Hoosain” to Parvana? How do you think this made Parvana feel?

Activity – poetry

Identity is a key theme of this chapter. Discuss what is meant by the term identity? Can you create an acrostic poem that puts forward your identity with the word? Don't write names on this and see if your other class members can guess who each one belongs to. What makes you, you?

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Chapter 7

- One of the biggest revelations in this chapter is the arrival of the Taliban man to where Parvana is reading letters, how do you think she felt when she realized who this man was?
- What would happen to her if she was caught acting as a boy?
- The man got emotional when Parvana read the letter to him, could it be possible that members of the Taliban had feelings?
- How could the Taliban be carrying out these acts if they have feelings? What reason do you think individuals might have for joining this group? (mob



mentality, fear, control, acting out aggression etc) **do you think they feel bad about their actions? Do any of them? Do all of them? Why/why not?**

- **Do you think what Parvana seen behind the blackened window will be 'good' or 'bad'? what do you think it is?**

Literacy- write a short journal entry that Parvana might have written during this time when she had started to pretend she was a boy. Think of all the feelings she might have. Think of the sights and sounds she would encounter.

Chapter 8

How is life different for Parvana, Nooria, Ali and Maryam compared with the lives of you, your friends and brothers and sisters? Make a chart for comparison

<u>Our life in Northern Ireland</u>	<u>Life for children in Afghanistan</u>
Can play outside safely	Can not go out alone
Usually breathe fresh air and are outside at least once or twice a day	Haven't been outside and felt sunshine or daylight for most of their lives (Ali)

Chapter 9

- **How do you think Parvana felt seeing one of her friends from school and realizing more people were doing what she was doing?**
- **Do you think it changed Parvana, speaking to a friend? How does it make us feel when catching up with a friend?**

Character review

How do you feel about the characters in the story so far? Has your opinion changed on anyone from the beginning to now?

Create a character board for 4 characters and describe their personality and your opinion on them. Discuss with the class to see if your opinions differ/are the same. Is it okay to have different opinions? Why might we think different things about the same character?

<p><u>Nooria</u> Bossy Helpless Sad hopeful</p>	<p><u>Parvana</u> Strong Hardworking</p>
<p><u>Mother</u> Disheartened Downtrodden</p>	

Chapter 10

- **Why do you think Parvana wasn't so keen on doing this job? Would you do it? Why/why not?**
- **Parvana asked Shauzia that if this had of been her bones, would she mind someone digging them up. Shauzia started to speak but then remained silent and continued with the work. What do you think her answer would have been?**



- When discussing the possibility of land mines being around, Parvana remembered the saying ‘there are more land mines than flowers in Kabul’ what image does this create of the place in your head? Why do you think they were compared to flowers?
- They also said that they were told some landmines were disguised by toys, specifically to target children. Why do you think someone would want to do this? What were they achieving by doing this?
- Shauzia and Parvana talked about a day in the future when they would be rich old ladies drinking tea and talking about what they used to have to do. What does this tell you? (they still have hope) Do you think it is easy for them to imagine these days in their future? Why do you think they still have hope in such circumstances?

Activity – Art Draw a picture of a time where you had to have hope in a time that it was difficult.

Chapter 11

- Shauzia and Parvana enter what they believe to be a football match at the stadium to sell their goods. It turns out not to be this. Reflect not only on what the girls seen in the stadium, but also how it makes you feel hearing about it.

Chapter 12

- “No one said anything to Parvana when the bread ran out, but she got up and went to work that day anyway”. How do you think being the person that is responsible for getting enough money to feed the entire family is affecting her?
- The title of the story is ‘the breadwinner’ can you see why? Can you suggest any alternative titles for the story?
- “I just want a normal, boring life” states Parvana. What do you think she is missing? Is there anything you take for granted that the story is making you grateful for?

Activity – Gratitude page

Create a poster/piece of artwork/writing which shows all of the things you are grateful for in your life. If there is anyone who makes your list e.g. parents, carers, dinner ladies, policemen/women, lollipop men/women, make sure to let them know!!

Activity

Parvana feels ‘responsible’ for her whole family during this time where her father is gone. Do you have responsibilities for anything? You as older children have responsibilities for the younger children in school. Children to discuss and compile a list of ‘**Our responsibilities**’. Relate to Playground Pals.

Chapter 13

- Why do you think Parvana had so many questions about Nooria getting married?
- Why did Parvana not want to go with the family? How do you think she felt when the family left without her?
- Nooria and Parvana had a few arguments and cross words throughout the story, why then did Parvana want to buy her a gift?
- List the pros and cons of Nooria leaving. What advice would you give her?



Activity_the 'freeze frame' two different scenes:

1: Parvana leaving when she is cross about Nooria moving away.

2: When mum , Nooria and the siblings get into the car to leave.

The other children in the class to give feeling words to the characters.

Activity: prediction

Who do you think is crying? What will happen next?

Chapter 14

- **How would you describe Parvana? She helped this lady without knowing who she was or what had happened to her. Would you have trusted the woman? What kind of person would you say this makes Parvana?**
- **The woman reveals the shocking news that the Taliban have recently invaded Mazar. How do you think Parvana felt in that moment?**
- **Was Mrs Weera really confident that the family was safe** (she couldn't have been, she was trying to cheer Parvana up, she was trying to fill her with hope, to support her with not giving up)
- **Why did Mrs Weera ask Shauzia to help?**
- **How did Shauzia change Parvana's attitude?**
- **One amazing thing happened at the end of this chapter which we mightn't have expected. Do you think this will help Parvana? How?**

Activity – can you think about a time when you felt down and a friend helped to cheer you up? Why are friends so important to have?

Write a list of what helps change your mood when you are feeling down.

Activity – final chapter

The next chapter is the final chapter of the story. Can you work as a group to discuss and plan out what you think will happen in the final chapter and how it will end. Will it have a happy or sad ending? How will things get solved? Don't forget to **use your co-operative groups of 4, with 1 acting as the recorder.**

Feed back to class and discuss others ideas – are there any holes in their ending?

Chapter 15

- **Shauzia wanted to leave to make a better life for herself. Mrs Weera questions Parvana on this. Parvana decides she cant decide who is right in this situation. Who do you think is right?** Create a list of reasons why Shauzia should leave and why she should stay. Which list is longer? Are there any points you agree with or disagree with? What would you do?
- **Parvana and her father were heading off to find the rest of the family, do you feel positive about their future?**

Activity Parvana has her father back and her hope. Write a letter from Parvana to Nooria to tell her what is happening.

