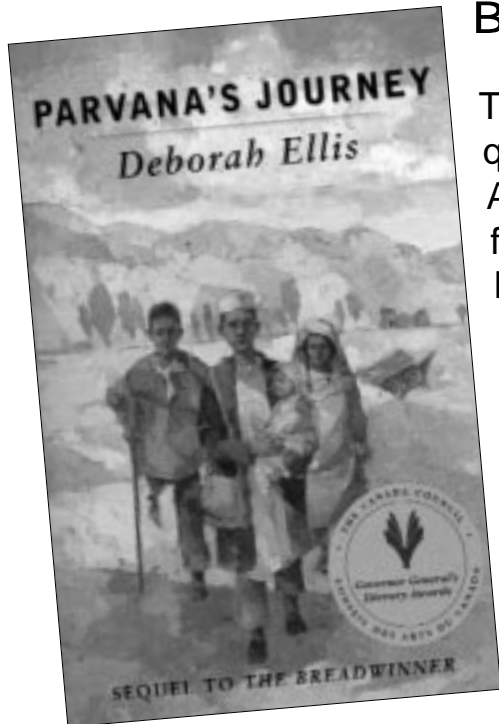




# *Parvana's Journey*

by Deborah Ellis



## BOOK SUMMARY:

This gripping novel tells the story of Parvana's quest to find her family. The Taliban still controls Afghanistan, but Kabul is in ruins, Parvana's father has died, and her mother, sister and brother could be anywhere in the country. In her search for shelter and food as she makes her way across the desolate Afghan countryside, she meets other children who are strays from the war. Their journey becomes even more perilous when war breaks out, though they don't know why the bombs are falling. It takes resilience, imagination and luck - and the family bond the children forge with each other - to help them survive.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Deborah Ellis is a writer who also works as a mental health residential counselor in Toronto. Her first novel for young teens, *Looking for X*, published in Fall 1999, won the 2000 Governor General's Award. In 1999, Deborah spent several months talking with women and girls in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and Russia. During her stay, she met the mother and sister of a girl in Kabul who cut off her hair, put on boy's clothes and sold things off a tray in the marketplace to support her family. This reminded her of children's enormous capacity for acts of courage and creative survival when the adult world conspires to stifle their future. The incident inspired Deborah to write the *Breadwinner Trilogy*. *Parvana's Journey* is the second book in this series.

**Pre-reading (All levels)**

1. Begin by reading aloud the Author's note pp. 195-197. Share what learners know about Afghanistan and the Taliban.
2. Review the Glossary on pp. 198-199.
3. Consult a map or atlas. Look up Afghanistan and discuss where it is situated in relation to Russia, Pakistan, Iraq, and Canada.
4. On the dedication page at the beginning of the book, the author has written, "To children we force to be braver than they should have to be." What do you think the author might mean by this dedication?
5. *Parvana's Journey* is based on real things that happened in Afghanistan, but it is a work of fiction. The inspiration for the story came from Afghan refugees that the author, Deborah Ellis, met in a refugee camp in Pakistan. It is the second book in a series. The first book, *The Breadwinner*, was also about Parvana. If any of the learners have read the first book, have them share what they remember of the story. If not, share the following brief summary:  
*In The Breadwinner, Parvana, then 11 years old, accompanies her father everyday to the market place where he earns money as a reader and writer of letters. One day, Parvana's father is arrested by the Taliban and the family is left without anyone to earn money and shop for food. Forbidden to work as a girl, Parvana must transform herself into a boy to save her family. Parvana is separated from her mother and siblings when they leave to go north for her older sister's wedding. Parvana stays behind in Kabul hoping that her father will be released from jail. The Breadwinner ends with Parvana and her father leaving Kabul to look for the rest of the family whom they now believe are in a refugee camp.*

**Discussion Questions**

Discussion questions are provided for different reading levels.

To make the book accessible for level 1 readers, download the chapter summaries from the Golden Oak website: <[www.accessOLA.com/programs/goldenoak2004](http://www.accessOLA.com/programs/goldenoak2004)>.

It is suggested that level 1 readers read the chapter summaries with their tutor or class instructor. Level 2 readers could try the chapter summaries by themselves or read the book with assistance from their tutor/instructor. Level 1 –2 discussion questions have been developed for each chapter as a guide. Discussion questions for level 3+ readers ask readers to reflect on the entire book. Questions from all the levels can easily be used with readers at a variety of levels.

**Level 1-2 Questions**

**Chapter 1: Level 1**

1. Who is the first person that you meet at the beginning of the story?
2. Who died?
3. What did you learn about Parvana's father?
4. List the nine things that Parvana takes from her house before she leaves for the man's house.
5. Where is the rest of Parvana's family?
6. Who is Parvana's best friend?
7. What type of writing does Parvana begin to do near the end of the first chapter?

**Level 2**

1. Who do you think will be the main character in the book?
2. What does Parvana mean when she says, "It was a large graveyard for such a small village"?
3. How does Parvana feel about her father?
4. Why are the books so important to Parvana?
5. Being at the man's house, with his wife and children, makes Parvana feel "almost normal." Why?
6. What type of writing does Parvana begin to do near the end of the first chapter?
7. Why does Parvana decide to leave for her journey after staying for only one week at the man's house?

**Chapter 2: Level 1**

1. What did Parvana and her father use to do while they walked?
2. Who does Parvana see on top of a hill?

**Level 2**

1. Parvana's father said, "Your brain needs exercise just like your body." Do you agree?
2. Why does Parvana walk away from the woman on the hill?

**Chapter 3: Level 1**

1. Parvana finds a village that has been bombed. She hears something and walks towards it. What does she find?

**Level 2**

1. Parvana looks at the baby and finds "no war in his face." What does she mean?

**Chapter 4: Level 1**

1. Who does Parvana meet in the cave?
2. Do you think that Parvana will leave Asif and baby Hassan behind when she leaves? Why or why not?

**Level 2**

1. Why do you think that Asif is so angry and mean towards Parvana?
2. What does Parvana do that lets you know she cares about Asif?

**Chapter 5: Level 1**

1. What does Asif do that shows you that he likes the baby and that he is beginning to trust Parvana?

**Level 2**

1. Asif bathes baby Hassan and lets Parvana wash his hair. What do you think that his actions are saying?

**Chapter 6: Level 1**

1. What does Parvana think is buried in the cave?
2. How do the children feel before they dig up the box? How do they feel after they dig up the box?

**Chapter 6: Level 2**

1. What does Asif say he would buy if he had treasure? What does Parvana say she would buy if she had treasure? Why do you think the children give these specific responses?
2. Why is Parvana so angry with herself after the box is found? Do you think her reasons are valid?

**Chapter 7: Level 1**

1. Does Asif decide to go on the journey with Parvana? How does she feel about this?

**Level 2**

1. Parvana writes to Shauzia that she hopes the children find a place with grown-ups, so they will take care of the baby. Do you think that this is the only reason Parvana wants to find a place with grown-ups?

**Chapter 8: Level 1**

1. How does Asif help Parvana on the journey?
2. What is Parvana hired to do? Why is she hired and not Asif?
3. What happens after Parvana finishes cleaning?

**Level 2**

1. Parvana writes to Shauzia that she no longer believes in fairy tales. Why do you think she says this?
2. Why is it important that Parvana also includes the information that she may believe in fairy tales again sometime in the future?
3. How do you think the children feel at the end of this chapter? Why?

**Chapter 9: Level 1**

1. What challenges do the children face in this chapter?

**Level 2**

1. Who is "Parvana the Protector"?

**Chapter 10: Level 1**

1. How do the children get sick?
2. What is Parvana's dream?
3. What happens when a large rock is thrown into the field?

**Level 2**

1. How does Parvana feel about being the one who always has to remember things?
2. What kind of world does Parvana want?
3. Why does Parvana tear the page about the new world out of her book?

**Chapter 11: Level 1**

1. How do the children get across the land mine field?
2. Describe the place where Leila lives.
3. Parvana says, "Any food is good food." Do you agree?

**Level 2**

1. How does Leila see the land mine field?
2. What does the sleeping grandmother represent to Parvana?
3. What do Parvana and Leila have in common?

**Chapter 12: Level 1**

1. What items does Leila show to Parvana?
2. Parvana and Leila decide to become "\_\_\_\_\_ " and Asif and Hassan become their "\_\_\_\_\_."

**Level 2**

1. Why does Leila refer to Parvana as her "sister" and to Asif and Hassan as her "brothers"?

2. Why does Parvana think that she has found her "Green Valley"?

**Chapter 13: Level 1**

1. What is Parvana's plan?
2. Where does the baby crawl? Who saves him?
3. In a letter to Shauzia, what items does Parvana wish for? How would she get them?

**Level 2**

1. What do you learn about Asif that helps to explain his anger? Why is he alone?
2. Do you think Leila really believes that the earth will not hurt her because she "feeds" it?
3. If another peddler were to die in the mine field, the children would get more items. This thought causes Parvana to conclude that she did not create the world she is living in, but that she only has to live in it. How has this journey changed Parvana so far?

**Chapter 14: Level 1**

1. Who takes care of Grandmother?
2. What does Parvana think of while she cleans the shelves?
3. What does Leila want to learn?

**Level 2**

1. What are some things that mothers usually do?
2. Are there any characters who have taken on the role of "mother"?
3. For whatever reason, both of the young girls' mothers left them behind in uncertain and frightening circumstances. What do you think about this? What does it say about the mothers and what does it say about the daughters?

**Chapter 15: Level 1**

1. Where are the scary and loud noises coming from?
2. What do they do in the afternoon? Does Asif participate?
3. How does Grandmother die?

**Level 2**

1. Parvana sees the planes with bombs as, "grown-ups killing each other." How do you think Parvana feels about adults?
2. The girls discuss killing and how it makes sense to kill animals if you are going to eat them. If killing children, on the other hand, does not make sense, then why do you think it continues to happen?
3. Green Valley is destroyed. What do you think that the children will have to do next?

**Chapter 16: Level 1**

1. How many children are now on the journey?
2. Why can Parvana no longer pretend to be a boy?
3. The children are so hungry that they begin to eat what item?
4. Why is Parvana so happy that Leila chose the route for them to continue their journey?

**Level 2**

1. Why do you think the author of the book chose to destroy Green Valley?
2. Is Parvana responsible for "all of her dreams turning into garbage"? Should she stop dreaming?
3. The author uses the term "chew on", which means literally that they "gnaw the book pages with their teeth". However, also reflect upon the term "chew on" to mean "consider or think about." What does this mean for the characters if you focus on the latter meaning?

**Chapter 17: Level 1**

1. What happens when it becomes dark?
2. Why do the children keep drinking the stream water, even though they know it will make them sick?
3. They meet a man and his family. Where does the man direct them?

**Level 2**

1. What physical condition are the children in at this point in the novel?
2. What mental and emotional state do you think the children are in at this point in the novel?
3. Parvana has been through a lot so far, so why does the bombed out orchard frighten her so much?

**Chapter 18: Level 1**

1. Are the people the children meet on their journey able to help them? Why or why not?
2. Where do they finally get to? What is it like?

**Level 2**

1. Why does Parvana feel that she is in the middle of a nightmare?
2. Parvana feels like “nothing” because the part of her that was her is gone. What do you think she means by this?

**Chapter 19: Level 1**

1. When they get to the camp, what happens to the baby? What happens to the other children?
2. For how long does Parvana think they will be at the camp?
3. The camp is crowded, but Parvana is happy to be there. Why?

**Level 2**

1. How do the children demonstrate their loyalty and love for the baby and for each other in this chapter?
2. Why is Parvana so happy that there are “proper” adults around them?
3. Do you think that these grown-ups will do a better job of taking care of the children than Parvana did? Is Parvana’s role of caretaker over now that they are in the camp?

**Chapter 20: Level 1**

1. Why do men yell at Parvana? What does she do?
2. What does the airplane throw down to the people in the camp?
3. Why does Leila run to get them? What happens?
4. What amazing thing happens at the end of this chapter? What do you think will happen next?

**Level 2**

1. Why does Parvana scream loudly in the middle of the camp? What happens?
2. Parvana rushes into the minefield to get Leila. Why does she do this dangerous thing?
3. What is the woman’s reaction to the death of Leila? Why?
4. What do you think Parvana is feeling when she recognizes the woman in the burqa as her mother? What will happen next?

**Chapter 21: Level 1**

1. How are things different now for Parvana?
2. What sad news does she hear from her mother?
3. Do you think Parvana is happy that her bossy sister, Nooria, is back with her? Why?
4. Is Parvana’s journey over? How do you know?
5. What do you want to happen next to Parvana?

**Level 2**

1. What is a family? Parvana’s family is different now. Explain what this means. Does the author’s definition of a family challenge your usual perception of a family?
2. Do you see yourself as being able to go through what Parvana went through in this book? What are her main strengths?
3. What do you think she means when she says that her journey is not over yet?
4. Throughout the book, Parvana has been writing to her friend, Shauzia. Does Parvana really think that Shauzia will read these letters? Why do you think that Parvana always made time to write about things?
5. What do you want to happen next to Parvana?

**Level 3+ Questions**

1. What important things has Parvana learned from her father that help her survive? Why do you think Parvana doesn’t just give up on her journey? What keeps her going?
2. Parvana and Asif have a strange relationship. They argue with each other and Asif appears not to like Parvana. Why do they stay together? How do you think Asif really feels about Parvana?
3. Parvana frequently writes letters to her friend Shauzia. Do you think that she believes that her friend will ever receive them? Why does she write the letters?
4. Parvana and Asif steal some eggs and a chicken. How do they justify the theft? What do you think of their reasoning?
5. Parvana starts her journey alone and ends up in a group with 3 other children. Why do you think that she allows the others to join her on her journey?
6. How do you think people in a country such as Afghanistan cope with the horror that they see on a day-to-day basis? Do you think that children cope differently than adults? How does Parvana cope?
7. Did you think Parvana would eventually find her mother? How did you feel when Parvana and her mother were reunited?
8. Did the author give any clues (foreshadow) that one of the children was going to die? Were you surprised that it was Leila who died and not Hassan the baby?
9. What do you think the author is trying to say about war with this story? Why?

**Additional Activities**

1. Return to the dedication page at the beginning of the book. After reading the book or chapter summaries, how has your understanding of the author’s dedication changed? “To children we force to be braver than they should have to be.”
2. Deborah Ellis, the author, has given all the royalties from the sale of this series to an organization called Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Why do you think she has done this? To learn more about the organization visit their website: [www.w4wafghan.ca](http://www.w4wafghan.ca).
3. Throughout the story, Parvana carries a book that her father gave her. It is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Parvana’s English isn’t very good, so she tries to guess what the book might be about from its title. Borrow the video from your public library or rent it to show your learner/class and discuss what the author might have been saying by including it in her story.