



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Breadwinner

Deborah Ellis

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Deborah Ellis

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Compare and contrast, predicting, cause and effect, research, sequencing, details, drawing inferences, pros and cons

### Literary Elements

Character analysis, story mapping, figurative language, point of view, theme, descriptive language, flashback, exaggeration, symbolism, plot, humor, author's style and craft, mood

### Writing

Description, brochure, advertisement, essay, letter, creative writing, book review, magazine article, poetry

### Critical Thinking

Supporting details, recalling, summarizing

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate

### Vocabulary

Thesaurus/dictionary, context clues, synonyms, antonyms, illustrations and photographs

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—geography, current events, map skills, government, time lines, history, cultures, civil rights, customs; Math—graphing; Drama—monologue, writing, acting; Art—illustrating, painting; Health—nutrition, medical care, resources; Foreign Language—vocabulary

**Genre:** fiction (based on current events)

**Setting:** Afghanistan, late 1990s

**Point-of-View:** third person

**Themes:** family, survival, repression of women, defiance, sacrifice, resilience of the human spirit

**Conflict:** person vs. person, person vs. society, person vs. self

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** somber, yet hopeful

**Date of First Publication:** 2001 (in USA)

## Summary

*The Breadwinner* takes place in Afghanistan in the 1990s amid the tyranny of the Taliban. Parvana and her family enjoy a normal life in Kabul until the Taliban invade and take over their country. Now girls and women may not leave their homes without a male escort, and Parvana's family is reduced to poverty by the relentless bombings. When her father is arrested because he is Western-educated, Parvana disguises herself as a boy in order to provide for her family. As Parvana struggles to support her mother and three siblings, she befriends Shauzia, who also masquerades as a boy to assist her family. Parvana's mother and siblings venture to northern Afghanistan, and her father is eventually released from prison. At the conclusion of the novel, Parvana and her father set out in search of the rest of their family.

## About the Author

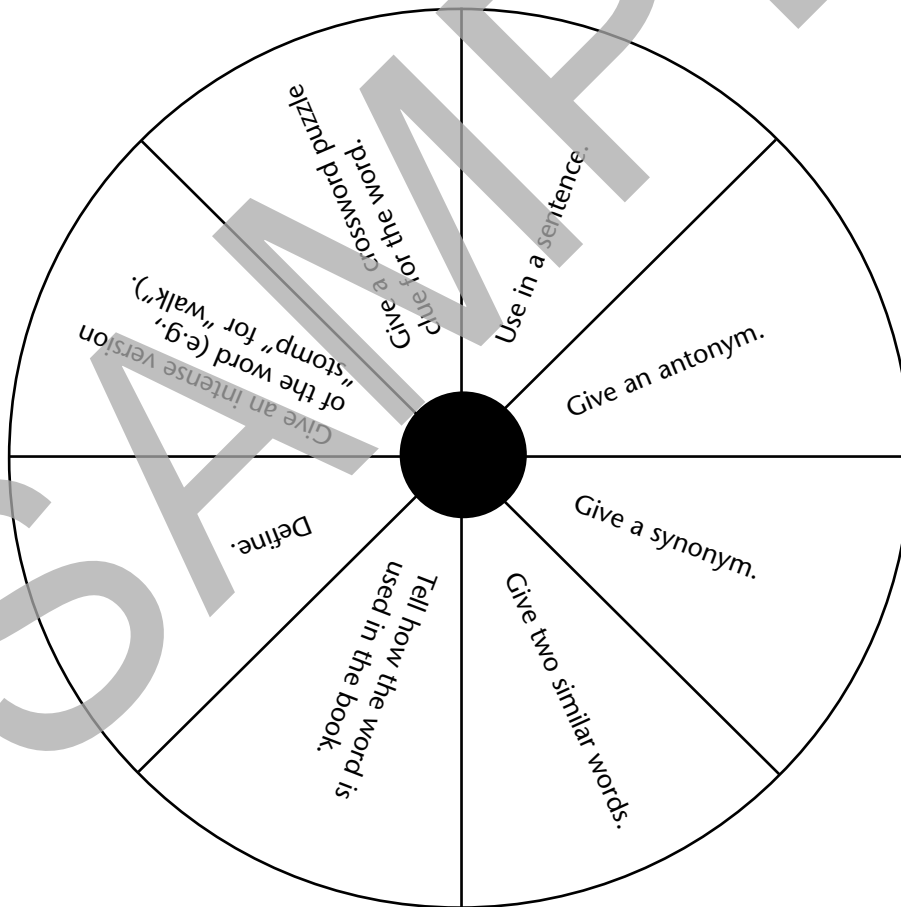
Deborah Ellis was born in 1960 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada, where she works as a mental health counselor in a group home for women. She was awarded the Governor General's Award in Canada for her first novel, *Looking for X* (1999). After spending time in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, Ellis wrote *The Breadwinner* based on stories she heard from the women in the camps. She has also published *Parvana's Journey* (2002) and *Mud City* (2003) to complete *The Breadwinner* trilogy. All royalties from *The Breadwinner* are donated to Women for Women in Afghanistan, a group which is dedicated to the education of Afghan girls in refugee camps in Pakistan.

## Background Information

Afghanistan, a country at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has been destroyed by years of war. In 1994, the Taliban militia gained control of the country and imposed harsh restrictions on the people of Afghanistan. Books were burned, and all music was forbidden. Women and girls were not allowed outside without a male escort, and even then females had to be completely covered by a cloth garment called a *burqa*. Many Afghans with Western ties were imprisoned, and females were not allowed to go to school or hold jobs. A map of Afghanistan on pages 4–5 of the novel, an Author's Note with historical information (pp. 167–168), and a glossary of terms (pp. 169–170) will assist the reader in understanding the geography and culture of Afghanistan.

## Vocabulary Wheel

**Directions:** Write each vocabulary word on a piece of paper (one word per piece). Make a spinner using the circle below. Now play the following game with a classmate. (It is a good idea to have a dictionary and thesaurus handy.) Place the papers in a small container. The first player draws a word from the container. The player then spins the spinner and follows the direction where the pointer lands. For example, if the player draws the word "turbans" and lands on "define," the player must define the word turbans. If the player's partner accepts the answer as correct, the first player scores one point and play passes to the second player. If the player's partner challenges the answer, the first player uses a dictionary or thesaurus to prove the answer is correct. If the player can prove the answer is correct, the player earns two points. If the player cannot prove the answer is correct, the opposing player earns two points. Play continues until all the words have been used. The player with the most points wins.

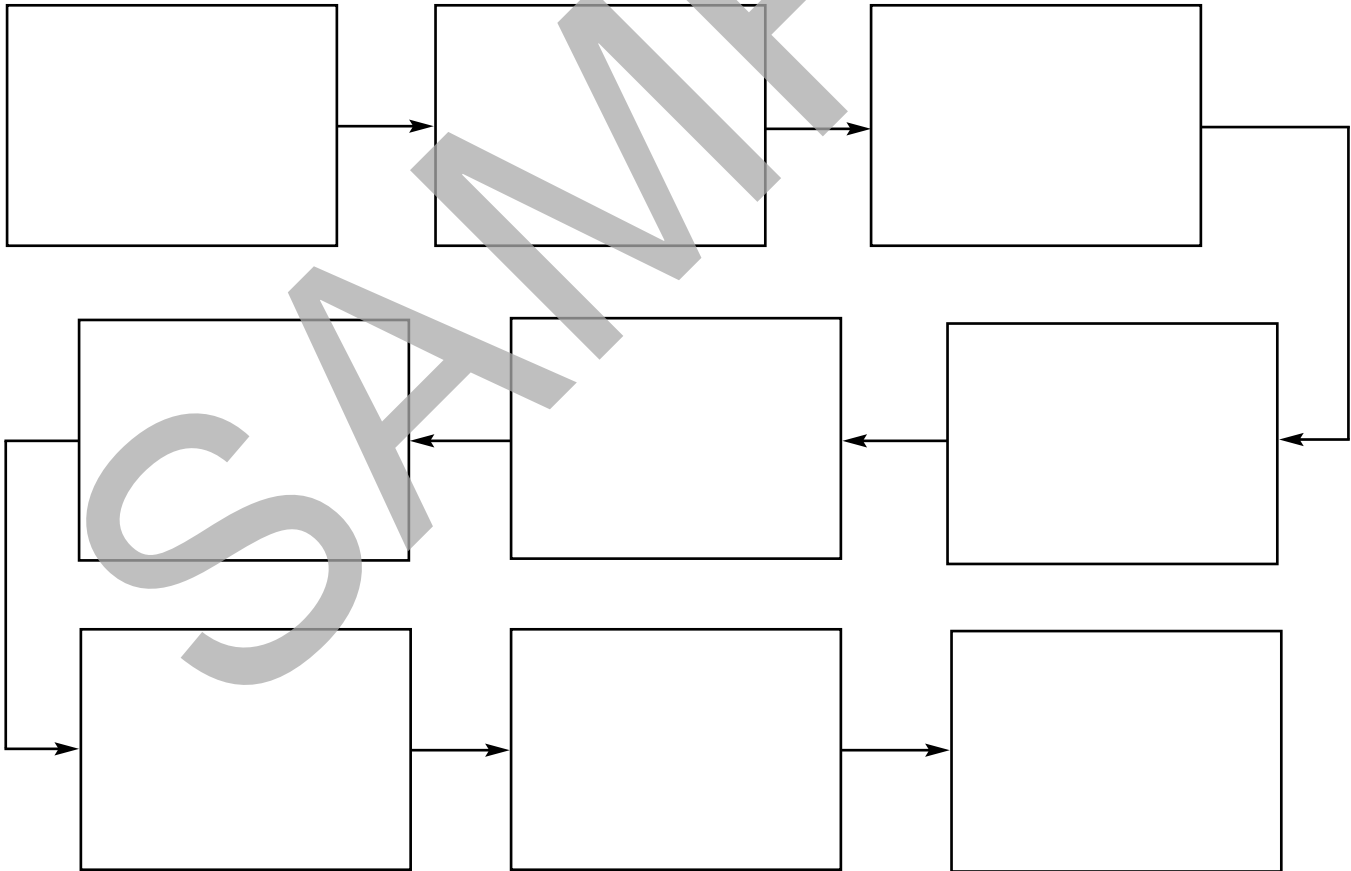


# Story Map

Title

Setting, Characters, Problem, Solution

## Series of Events



## Chapters Seven–Eight, pp. 74–94

Parvana successfully sells several items and translates a letter for a Talib in the marketplace. Dressed as a boy, Parvana escorts her female family members throughout Kabul. In the marketplace, Parvana meets another girl, Shauzia, who is also acting as a boy in order to provide for her family.

### Vocabulary

embedded (78)  
vibrant (81)  
labyrinth (81)  
splendidly (85)  
gleaming (86)  
latrine (89)  
escort (89)  
embroidered (93)  
collided (94)  
sprawled (94)

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Parvana feel about her newfound freedom as a boy? (*Parvana enjoys not having to wear a chador, as well as the freedom to be in public by herself. p. 74*)
2. Why must Parvana tell people that Father is ill instead of saying that he was arrested? (*No one wants to associate with someone who is perceived to be an enemy of the government. pp. 75–76*)
3. Discuss why the Taliban do not want the Afghan citizens to be educated and/or literate. (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: It is easier to control and manipulate people who are uneducated and cannot communicate with each other by written means.*)
4. How does reading the Talib's letter in the marketplace challenge Parvana's assumptions about the Taliban? (*Parvana has never thought of the members of the Taliban as regular people with real problems. When the Talib shows emotion, especially sadness, at the death of his wife, Parvana is very surprised. Given the Taliban's extreme beliefs about women's unimportance in society, it is hard for Parvana to imagine a Taliban man feeling anything but contempt for his wife. pp. 77–80*)
5. Analyze the meaning of Parvana's thought—"How could the sun be shining when her father was in jail?" (p. 82). (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: Parvana doesn't understand how life outside her home could appear happy and normal when her father is not there with the family.*)
6. Discuss the pros and cons of Mother and Mrs. Weera creating a magazine. Predict what will happen to them if the magazine is discovered. (*Answers will vary. p. 83*)
7. Why do you think Nooria usually responds negatively to Parvana? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Nooria must stay inside with the younger children all the time, while Parvana has the freedom to venture outside. Although what Parvana is doing presents a great danger, Nooria would rather have that opportunity than be confined to the house with all of the chores. p. 84*)
8. How does Parvana's discovery of the tea boy add realism to the story? Does this discovery diminish your perception of Parvana as a heroine? Why or why not? (*Having another girl masquerading as a boy to provide for her family shows the reader that Parvana's situation is not unique. Other families are doing the same thing in order to survive. Answers will vary. p. 94*)
9. **Prediction:** What relationship will form between Parvana and the tea boy?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Foreign Language: Research the Dari or Pashtu language. Create a small dictionary to translate between Dari or Pashtu and English.
2. Social Studies: Research the practice of arranged marriages. Write a persuasive essay in which you argue your opinion of this custom.
3. Art: Create a painting of the Kabul marketplace.