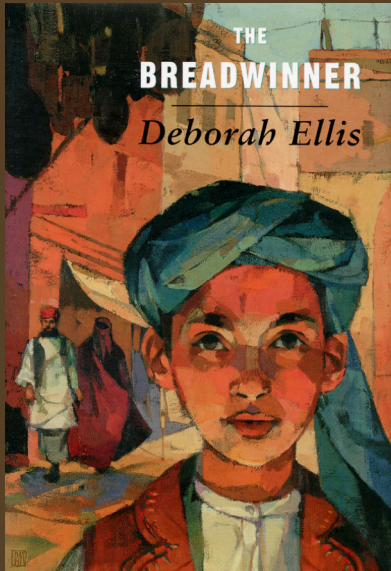


# Breadwinner Reading Guide



## Questions and Ideas for Consideration

**Afghanistan:** Given your previous knowledge and perceptions of Afghanistan, what possible ways might this book shape understanding of this country?

**Culture:** In what ways does this book offer insight into Afghanistan and the Taliban that many children might not otherwise experience? Do you think the information is accurately and authentically portrayed? Why or why not?

**America:** How are Americans portrayed in *Breadwinner*? Do you think this book is intended for an American audience, and if so, why offer this portrayal?

**Education:** What role does education play in the story? How does this book send purposeful messages about the value of education? Is this a Western perspective?

**Gender/Ideology:** How does this book complicate issues of gender, especially when it comes to world politics and perspectives? Does it engage an idea similar to “presentism”, applying ideologies related to gender to characters that they may or may not have access to or experience with in some parts of the world?

**Author’s Note:** Consider Ellis’s perspective and what experience does she have to help her describe Parvana’s life under the Taliban. How does this shape the text?

## Daybook Possibilities

- Look up and describe other books that have won the Middle East Book Award and research authors of these books. What do you notice about children’s literature written about the Middle East?
- Do a search for “children” with various terms you associate with the Middle East. What do you discover about perceptions of children/childhood?
- Look up pictures to help you understand some of the Afghan or Muslim terminology or places and paste them in your daybook. Research the history of Afghanistan and describe how this fits with the novel.
- How might you use or teach *Breadwinner* or other books about the Middle East in your classroom? Brainstorm some lesson plan ideas, and write about limitations or considerations for doing so.
- Visit Deborah Ellis’s website at [deborahellis.com/](http://deborahellis.com/) or read an interview with her at <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/authors/experts/dellis.asp>. Write what you discover and how your perception of the book changes.
- Read “Save the Muslim Girl” by Özlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall (available online). How does this shift your perspectives about stereotypes and problematics of the text?

## Resources and Critical Reading

“Missionary Girl Power: Saving the ‘Third World’ one Girl at a Time” by Özlem Sensoy\* and Elizabeth Marshall

“The Arab World in Children's Books: Finding Palestine” by Elsa Marston

“Radical Children's Literature Now!” by Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel

## Background and Context

Deborah Ellis's award-winning novel, *The Breadwinner* (2001) tells the story of Parvana (daughter of educated parents who are secretly critical of the Taliban), who must cut her hair and dress as a boy in order to support the family after her father's imprisonment. The book became a bestseller after the events of September 11 raised concern about Afghanistan and the Taliban. Critics note the book’s positives and problematics, writing “Ellis's work in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan inspired the series, and she donates all royalties to Women for Women in Afghanistan. But the Breadwinner trilogy also was used to justify the US-led invasion of Afghanistan... exposing female suffering under the Taliban, the books feed the notion that all Moslem girls and women need to be saved by the West” (Nel & Mickenberg).