

The Breadwinner

By Deborah Ellis

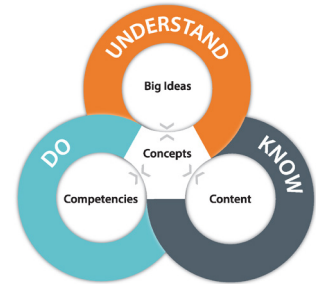
About the novel

The Breadwinner is a story about Parvana, an 11-year-old girl living with her family in Kabul, Afghanistan under Taliban rule, where girls are forbidden to leave the house unaccompanied by a male. Parvana's father is unfairly arrested, leaving the family without any way of making money to buy food and other necessary supplies. In order for her family to survive, Parvana must cut off her hair, dress as a boy, and go to work in the market in disguise. *The Breadwinner* is a story of bravery, of independence and family, and of what life was like for civilians – especially women and girls – in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The book is an international bestseller, is included in the BC Teachers' Federation 100 Best Books list, and has been published in twenty-five languages.

In this lesson, students learn about a different culture and way of life while considering and exploring life skills (and concepts related to gambling) such as courage, decision-making, and navigating risk.

About the author

Deborah Ellis is a Canadian, award-winning author and activist who has written over thirty books for children and young adults. Ellis wrote the Breadwinner series after travelling to Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. She had many conversations and interviews with Afghan refugee women and girls over the span of several months, and from those interactions the stories of Parvana and her family and friends emerged. Ellis has made over one million dollars in royalties for her Breadwinner series, most of which she has donated to the Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and to Street Kids International.



Instructional strategies

1. Have students start reading *The Breadwinner*. When they get to chapter 10, read aloud to the class until you reach this passage on page 99:

"She knew she was faced with three choices. One choice was to not go to the bathroom until she got home. That was not possible – she really couldn't hold it much longer. Another choice was to go to the bathroom outside the doorway, where people might

see her and figure out she was a girl. The third was to step into the darkness, go to the bathroom in private, and hope she didn't explode."

- a. Once you have read the passage, stop and ask students the following questions:
 - i. What are the risks and/or benefits of each of Parvana's options? What do you think she is feeling and needs to consider in this moment when she has to make a decision?



- ii. What would you do in her situation, and why? Explain your points of view.
 - iii. Have you ever had to make a decision that involved risk before? How did you know what the right choice was? How did it feel making the decision? If you can't think of an example, how do you imagine you would feel or know what the best decision was to make?
2. Invite students to continue reading the whole book. Then have a class discussion based on the scenes identified below. (Or, if desired, stop the students periodically while reading the book to discuss each set of questions.)
- a. Parvana is asked to dress up as a boy in the market.
 - i. What are the possible benefits and harms/risks of her doing this?
 - ii. Would you do the same if you were in her situation? Why or why not?
 - b. Parvana and Shauzia dig up bones in the graveyard to sell for money.
 - i. Do you consider this to be a risky act? Why or why not? Why do you think they feel as though they need to do it? Do you think you could do it if you were in their situation?
 - ii. If you needed to make money here in Canada at your age, what would you do? What can you do? How about if you were an adult – can you think of any ways that people try to make quick money?
 - c. Parvana's mother and siblings hear that the city of Mazar is safe, so they leave Kabul to take Nooria to Mazar to get married and start a new life. Ultimately, they think it is safer

for Nooria to be in Mazar than in Kabul. A little while later Parvana finds the starving and crying girl, Homa, in the dark building in Kabul. Homa explains that Mazar is, in fact, very dangerous and she has just escaped from there to try to save her own life by coming to Kabul.

- i. Both Nooria and Homa take a risk to leave their home in search of a safer and better life, but they do not know that where they are headed is also dangerous and not what they are expecting. What types of things do you think they each were thinking about when considering the decision to move to a 'better life'? What do you think they were feeling when they made their decisions?
- ii. Have you ever made a decision where the result ended up not being what you had hoped for or expected? What was that experience like? How did it feel when you realized your choice turned out to be different than you thought it would be?

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- ✓ Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- ✓ As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- ✓ We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other



Competencies

- ✓ Consider dominant social discourses and assess their impact on the distribution of risk and benefit associated with gambling
- ✓ Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human cultures and impacts the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, and societies
- ✓ Assess the ways in which material goods are distributed in society, how those goods are valued, and how this is related to gambling policies and behaviours

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, see: <https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf>

Links to curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- ✓ Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- ✓ Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- ✓ Learning requires exploration of one's identity
- ✓ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story

English Language Arts 4-6

Big ideas

- ✓ Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world

- ✓ Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies

- ✓ Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and develop understanding of self, community, and world
- ✓ Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding
- ✓ Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives
- ✓ Use a variety of comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading, listening, or viewing to construct meaning from text
- ✓ Apply a variety of age-appropriate thinking skills to gain meaning from texts
- ✓ Respond to text in personal and creative ways
- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- ✓ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- ✓ Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking

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