

One More Mountain: A Parvana Story

AUTHOR
DEBORAH ELLIS

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

In Kabul, 15-year-old Damsa runs away to avoid being forced into marriage by her family. She is helped by Shauzia who takes her to her friend Parvana's Green Valley school.

It has been twenty years since Parvana and Shauzia had to disguise themselves as boys to support their families. And when the Taliban were defeated in 2001, they began to rebuild their lives. But everything changed in 2021 when the Taliban rose to power again and the restrictions they reimposed had a devastating impact on women and girls and their hard-won freedoms.

With little warning, Kabul airport is shut down and danger is everywhere. And when the Taliban come to Green Valley, Parvana and Shauzia's community faces new dangers from an old enemy as Afghanistan is once again under siege.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Ellis has achieved international acclaim with her courageous and dramatic books that give Western readers a glimpse into the plight of children in developing countries. She has won the Governor General's Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the University of California's Middle East Book Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award.

A long-time feminist and anti-war activist, she is best known for the Parvana series, which has been published around the world in twenty-nine languages, with more than two million dollars in royalties donated to organisations such as Women for Women in Afghanistan, Mental Health Without Borders, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the Leprosy Mission, Children in Crisis fund of IBBY and the UNHCR.

In 2017, Parvana was adapted into an award-winning animated film called *The Breadwinner*. Deborah will be donating 100% of her royalties from *One More Mountain* to Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, an organisation working on the ground to provide urgent food supplies and emergency aid to those in need across Afghanistan. In 2006, Deb was named to the Order of Ontario and in 2016 she was named to the Order of Canada.

THEMES

- Afghanistan
- Taliban
- Terrorism
- Education

- Feminism
- Family
- War
- Loss
- Oppression
- Courage

STUDY NOTES

- Find the Behind the News program titled *Afghanistan Crisis Explained for Kids* (ABC TV, August 25, 2022) on YouTube. The video is a little over five minutes long and provides an excellent overview of the events leading to the US withdrawal from Kabul in 2021, and the chaos that ensued. Ask the following questions after watching the video:
 - How were Afghani girls and women treated by the Taliban after they came to power in the 1990s?
 - Why did the US (and Australia) invade Afghanistan in 2001?
 - How did Afghanistan change after 2001?
 - How did the lives of girls and women change after 2001?
 - Why did the US decide to leave Afghanistan in 2021?
 - How did Afghans react to the USs withdrawal?
- ‘Out of something bad, something good happens.’ (p 33) Would the girls living in Parvana’s Green Valley women’s centre agree with Larmina’s statement? Talk about the reasons why Damsa, Zahra and Alia came to live at Green Valley and how their lives changed after they settled there.
- ‘So, the lesson, dear Damsa, is that where we think we are going when we start out our journey is often not where we end up.’ (p 50) How does the story of Parvana’s earlier life (pp 49–50) illustrate this quote?
- How is the Talib that Parvana meets in Chapter Seven different to other members of the Taliban? How do his actions prove he is different?
- Can an author’s fictionalised account of real events be as disturbing as watching news footage of those events? In your answer, consider your reaction to reading Asif, Rafi and Maryam’s experience walking through the open sewer to the gates of Kabul airport (pp 91–98) and the aftermath of the explosion (pp 99–103). Compare your reaction with news footage of these same events (easily found on YouTube). Which brought the reality of the scene home to you better? Why did you react more strongly to one in particular?
- In what way is Maryam a complex character in the story? How do her actions in Chapter Fifteen show her at her best and worst?
- In Chapter Seventeen, Hadiyah and Larmina must choose which belongings they will take and which they will leave behind in Green Valley. If you needed to escape quickly and could only take three items in a backpack, what would the items be? Which items would you be most upset about leaving behind?
- ‘The Talib commander led him out into the park and got into one of the teacups with his men...He watched as the big teacups full of cheering young Talibs picked up speed and spun around and around and around.’ (pp 150–151) What later scene in Chapter Twenty-Two is similar to this one? [Answer: When the balloon seller offers one of his balloons to a bloodthirsty member of the Taliban so he can tie it to his truck.] Why might both scenes be described as satirical and tragic?
- What did Rafi’s encounter with the balloon seller and his family tell you about Afghani culture? Do you think Rafi did the right thing leaving the gold chains behind for the family?
- “‘Is that where we’re going?’ ... The mountains seemed close, but Damsa knew they were still many days of difficult travel away. (p 220) How does the imagery of mountains in this quote relate to the book’s title and the author’s dedication? What does the imagery of climbing mountains tell us about Afghanistan’s past and future?
- How are Rafi’s Dance of the Taliban in the Teacups and the musical *The Almond Seller* connected to a scene or conversation earlier in the novel? How does including them in the last chapter suggest hopefulness in the face of terrible things?
- On finishing *One More Mountain*, students should divide a page into four quarters, allocating each quarter a heading

with the name of one of the following characters:

- Parvana
- Rafi
- Shauzi
- Damsa.

Ask them to choose three adjectives to describe each character and write those adjectives in each quarter. For every adjective, find at least one incident or quote by that character that illustrate that aspect of them.