



“The World is Our Classroom”: Developing Global Awareness in Adolescents By Teaching Deborah Ellis’s Breadwinner Trilogy

—James C. Greenlaw

At the beginning of Afghani film director Siddiq Barmak’s movie, *Osama* (2003), hundreds of women, dressed in blue burqas, are seen marching down a mud-walled street and shouting in protest, “We are not political. We are hungry. Give us work! We are widows.” A few moments later, Taliban soldiers use fire hoses and rifles to force the women from the streets. One of those widows is a doctor, whose hospital has been closed, leaving her and her elderly mother and teenaged daughter penniless. When she and the girl are back in their home that night, the doctor says, “I wish I had a son instead of a daughter. He would help me.” She then cuts off her daughter’s long hair, dresses her in boy’s clothes, and finds her a job working in a restaurant with an old friend of the family. Not long after that, the girl assumes the name of Osama and is dragged off by a member of the Taliban to a training camp for young soldiers. Eventually she is discovered to be a girl and is given to an old Taliban leader to become one of his wives.

Barmak’s lens relentlessly exposes the horrific ironies of women’s lives in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. For instance, in a country where people are regularly wounded by bullets and grenades or maimed by land mines, the girl’s mother is nevertheless not allowed to practise medicine because she is a woman.

Teachers who would like to enable their adolescent students to explore in greater depth the global issues raised in Barmak’s film, such as the effects of war on the lives of children and the oppression of women by patriarchal regimes, can find in the recently completed Breadwinner trilogy by Canadian author Deborah Ellis a wealth of material to consider. Like Barmak’s film, Ellis’s books provide a moving portrayal of the injustices endured by teenaged girls in Afghanistan. Ellis’s young protagonists, Parvana and Shauzia, are also forced to assume male identities in order to earn money so that they can feed their families. While portions of Barmak’s film can be shown to younger

viewers, there are some scenes, such as the stoning to death of a woman who is accused of adultery, that are intended for more mature viewers. Thus, it is fortunate that Ellis's trilogy covers similar terrain but in a manner that can more sensitively engage young readers.

In 2002, the second book of Ellis's trilogy, *Parvana's Journey*, was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award. In this powerful novel, Parvana wanders through the Afghan wilderness from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif in a quest to be reunited with her family. At the beginning of her arduous journey, Parvana remembers the words of her father, who had been a history teacher before the Taliban sent him to prison. "The world is our classroom," he always said, before giving Parvana a science or a geography lesson" (23). Both as a teacher and a parent, Parvana's father encourages his daughter to question authority and to develop her own moral and cultural identity in order to give her hope for the future. As Parvana sets off on her journey to northern Afghanistan, she begins an inner quest as well. While she faces a series of external threats to her physical safety, she also grapples with a number of internal conflicts and moral dilemmas. In learning to cope with these challenges, Parvana eventually develops her identity as a strong and compassionate young woman. By sharing vicariously in Parvana's and Shauzia's struggles, Canadian adolescents may also learn about the importance of

thinking critically about injustices in their world.

In our current era of global conflict, many Canadians, youth and adults alike, are searching for answers to the questions about poverty and war that are raised in Ellis's Breadwinner trilogy. When parents and teachers enter into a dialogue with Canadian teens about the problems that adolescents face in other countries, it is worthwhile for them to think about what global education theorist Walt Werner refers to as "teaching for hope" (249). Undoubtedly, teaching young people about the difficult lives of Parvana and Shauzia in Afghanistan is not an easy assignment. As teachers attempt to guide their responses to texts that are full of tragic themes and images, the question that worries many is how they are supposed to enable their students to cope with despair in the face of such grim realities.

Werner argues that, while reading books such as *Parvana's Journey* may increase some adolescents' anxieties about the future, teachers, nevertheless, "need to reflect on the roles that emotion, information, vision, and efficacy may have in shaping young people's beliefs about their tomorrow" (252). In the following pages, I examine the themes and images of the three texts with reference to the views of global education theorists such as Werner. I also pay attention to the insights of a variety of postcolonial theorists, such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Ingrid Johnston, all of whom examine how relations

between power and culture are treated in literary texts, and I discuss Internet resources that teachers and students might find helpful in their attempts to respond to the Breadwinner trilogy. In this analysis, there are no simple prescriptions for reassuring young people that their world can be made a safer and fairer place in which to live. Instead, there are suggestions about how educators can involve students in research and literary responses that will help them to forge for themselves complex perspectives as maturing global citizens. The argument here is that, by studying Ellis's books, students can learn to probe their own emotional responses, gather information to help them interpret what they are reading, develop a vision of what a better world might be like, and critically examine injustices both in their own lives and in the lives of others.

My purpose, therefore, is to discuss the Breadwinner trilogy in terms of its power not to indoctrinate but to educate Canadian adolescents and adults about the way hope, love, and courage figure in the lives of children who are faced with overwhelming challenges. Ellis's books are certainly not bedtime stories. Rather, they are disturbing depictions of the kinds of tragedies and injustices that many women and children have been forced to endure in Afghanistan. Some of the tales Ellis narrates are actually composites of the stories she heard when she interviewed Afghani women in refugee camps in Pakistan. In these

moving and occasionally terrifying stories, Ellis helps her readers to see, through the eyes of children, the horrors of homelessness, starvation, political oppression, sexual discrimination, imperialism, and war.

The trilogy's first novel, *The Breadwinner*, opens in the Kabul market as Parvana quietly complains to herself that "I can read that letter as well as father can" (7). Because Parvana's father has lost his job as a teacher, he earns a living as a scribe reading and writing letters for illiterate customers. Parvana helps him with his work because the Taliban have said that girls are no longer permitted to go to school. In fact, all of the women of Kabul are forbidden to go out into the streets unless accompanied by a man. So Parvana's sister, Nooria, is not able to complete high school, nor is their mother, Fatan, able to continue in her career as a writer for a Kabul radio station. Parvana's older brother, Hossain, is killed by a land mine. Her baby brother, Ali, and little sister, Maryam, are locked in the house all day. One thing the family does in the evenings to pass the time is to take part in informal school lessons led by father or Nooria. On one occasion, father asks little Maryam a history question: "It was 1880, and the British were trying to take over our country. Did we want the British to take over?" (27). Maryam clearly answers that the Afghans did not want Britain to invade.

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues that

the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. Quite simply, the difference of space returns to the sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One. (300)

In *The Breadwinner*, the Taliban use the people's historical desire to repel invaders, such as the British and the Russians, as a weapon to intimidate them into submission through fear of an external enemy. One feature of the traditionalism to which Bhabha refers is the imposition of the burqa on Afghani women, even though this form of apparel had never been worn in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban regime. Parvana's father believes that women like his wife and daughters should be educated to understand the world, but the Taliban refuse to allow women to receive any education at all, claiming that the nation requires them to adhere, instead, to the traditional laws of Islam. At the end of the third chapter of *The Breadwinner*, these liberal views of Parvana's father get him into trouble with the Taliban. When he is told by a soldier that "Afghanistan doesn't need your foreign ideas," his response, that "Afghanistan needs more illiterate

thugs like you" (31), earns him a beating and a trip to prison. An important first step in helping students to think critically about the predicament of Parvana's family in the 1990s is to encourage them to research the history of the rise of the Taliban in the wake of more than a century of fighting that began with the invasion of British troops in the 1840s and ended with the invasion of Russian soldiers in the 1980s.

This first book introduces readers to many more Taliban atrocities. For example, when Fatana and Parvana ask the guards at Pul-I-Charkhi prison to give them back Parvana's father, the soldiers beat them with a stick and yell at them to go home. On another occasion, when Shauzia and Parvana, dressed up as boys, are returning home after a day of work in the Kabul market, they think they will try to earn a little extra money by selling tea in the soccer stadium. But instead of viewing a soccer game, they discover to their horror that the men are gathered there to witness several thieves receive the punishment of having their hands severed.

Hynes-Berry and Miller observe: "The literature of political protest examines conduct and values that the writer wants changed. Literature of political protest, though, has an urgency about it. It generally concerns a terrible injustice already existing or likely to happen. The writer calls for drastic changes in the social order to remedy this injustice" (538). In her attacks upon the injustices that she has heard

about from Afghani women, Ellis is clearly writing in the tradition of political protest, and she makes it very obvious to the reader that she feels that the actions of the Taliban are atrocious. At the same time, one of the larger issues that underlies Ellis's trilogy is how relations among various political, religious, and military powers (both local and global) can come together over time to establish the conditions under which organizations such as the Taliban can thrive.

Ellis wants her readers to think about the "collateral damage" that all warring factions, not just the Taliban, have caused in Afghanistan's history. Because the Taliban are in power during the period when the stories take place, they receive the bulk of Ellis's criticism, but she is careful to include burnt-out Soviet tanks in her descriptions as well, so that her readers have the opportunity to consider that when a war occurs in one country, it is often the result of larger global struggles. The British wanted to control Afghanistan in the nineteenth century to protect their interests in India. The Americans wanted to control Afghanistan to protect their interests in the Middle East. Students can, therefore, be encouraged to consider, as they see references in the trilogy to Soviet tanks or British invasions, that the Taliban were also at one time little children who, like Parvana and Shauzia, had once suffered themselves because of war. Students can see that some of the blame for the difficulties that these girls are experiencing attaches

to North Americans.

In Edward Said's discussion of Foucault's theory of power in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, he observes that "for power to work it must be able to manage, control, and even create detail: the more detail, the more real power, management breeding manageable units, which in turn breed a more detailed, a more finely controlling knowledge" (244). Deborah Ellis's protest writing in the Breadwinner clearly demonstrates how the Taliban go to great lengths to control the lives of women by denying them an education and locking them in their homes. The Taliban also torture political opponents in order to perpetuate their control over the men of Afghanistan. In little Maryam's history lesson about the British invaders, however, Ellis also convincingly shows that, when the Taliban made their bid for power, it was easy for them to establish a strong case against the many foreign enemies that they claimed were attempting to destroy Islamic culture in Afghanistan. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that, by the time the Taliban came into power, countries such as the United States had given them plenty of ammunition for propaganda to use in their efforts to fight off foreigners:

For decades in America there has been a cultural war against the Arabs and Islam: appalling racist caricatures of Arabs and Muslims suggest that

they are all either terrorists or sheikhs, and that the region is a large arid slum, fit only for profit and war. The very notion that there might be a history, a culture, a society—indeed many societies—has not held the stage for more than a moment or two, not even during the chorus of voices proclaiming the virtues of “multiculturalism”. (301)

When adolescents read the Breadwinner books, they may need assistance in understanding the historical relations to which Said alludes here. His critique of orientalist misrepresentations of Middle-Eastern countries is a good place to start in providing students with useful perspectives from which to interpret the events that take place in the novels. It also provides the impetus for teachers and students to study the rich cultural and intellectual traditions of the region in order to avoid the kinds of stereotypical misrepresentations of the Muslim world that are so common in Western films and books.

The opium trade, child labour, refugee camps, malnutrition, and arranged marriages are also all issues which Ellis raises, and which are important to discuss with young readers, especially after they have done additional research for themselves in online resources and encyclopedias. But when students do this research, it is important for them to “focus discussions not only on the informational content of issues, but also on their emotional content. How

do students feel about the issues? Emotions have to be shared—listened to and discussed—in order to be understood and harnessed for learning” (Werner 250). As Werner would argue, some students may have difficulty describing how they feel about the themes, images, and incidents depicted in the trilogy, so they should be given plenty of opportunities to express this in their written and verbal responses to these books. Most young people in Canada and the United States would find it difficult to locate Afghanistan on a map, so Ellis wisely provides a map of the region at the beginning of each text. It is challenging for adolescents to begin to understand the concerns of people who live in a place that is so far outside their normal frame of reference. But, if students are to begin to question their own taken-for-granted assumptions about Ellis’s characters, engaging both their research skills and their affective domain in these learning tasks is essential. At the same time as they begin to think about whether or not they have previously had misconceptions about Afghanistan’s people and culture, students can be encouraged to question their own values and world views about, for example, what constitutes a normal use of water and land, what should be the distribution of labour in their own homes, or how responsible they should be for the welfare of their family, friends, and neighbours. By thinking about the decisions that Parvana and Shauzia make in their lives, students can begin

to re-examine their own daily decisions and values.

A writing activity that can help students to overcome their feelings of physical and psychological distance from the characters in these books is to have some of them pretend, for instance, to be Parvana's father as he sits in his prison cell and composes a letter to Parvana in which he expresses how he feels about being separated from his family. Other students in the class can write Parvana's reply to her father's letter. Another reader-response activity that can help students to explore their feelings as they place themselves in the positions of the novels' characters involves them writing a stream-of-consciousness impression of the market in Kabul from Shauzia's perspective, as she walks from booth to booth observing the people to whom she is selling tea. Although the novels are told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the reader's consciousness is nevertheless funnelled through the minds of Parvana and Shauzia, so, in order to help the students share in the feelings of Parvana's mother or older sister, for example, they could write diary entries about how frightened these women are for the safety of Parvana as she goes alone to the market each day to work.

An important issue raised in the first book of the

trilogy is the empowerment of women through unions. A friend of Parvana's family, Mrs. Weera, is a vivacious, unemployed physical education teacher who is a member of the women's union to which Parvana's mother also belongs. Mrs. Weera has boundless energy and is constantly taking on projects such as teaching girls in secret or writing a clandestine women's magazine. A stark contrast to Mrs. Weera, however, is the Window Woman whom Parvana occasionally sees in an apartment that overlooks the stall where she works in the market. Unlike Mrs. Weera, the Window Woman is trapped in her apartment and can only communicate with Parvana by throwing little gifts such as a single red bead

out of the window and onto the blanket upon which Parvana sits. In a moment of terrible pathos, Parvana thinks that she hears the woman being beaten by her husband, but she has no way to come to her rescue. The issue of women's empowerment is a crucial one to discuss during the reading of *The Breadwinner*. Adolescents can be expected to feel concern about the plight of the Window Woman, so it is important to discuss with them the ways in which other Afghani women, such as Mrs. Weera and Parvana's mother, fight back against Taliban cruelty by, for example,



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writing an underground magazine for women even though they know that this action could eventually lead to their imprisonment. To explore their feelings about the Window Woman, students could write an article for Mrs. Weera's magazine in which they state how they feel about the behaviour of men such as the Window Woman's husband and in which they write their thoughts about whether or not the rules restricting the movement of women in Afghanistan should be changed.

Werner observes:

If we want students to develop a reasoned hope in the future, then during classroom discussions... [we must] provide greater awareness of the broad range of institutions dedicated to gathering and disseminating reliable information about issues, and of the many groups that use this information to lobby governments for new policies or changed laws. This research and development is premised on a strong confidence in the future. (251)

Students might become justifiably depressed about the plight of Parvana's imprisoned father, or of the Window Woman trapped by her husband in the apartment. Teaching for hope in this situation can involve showing the students the many ways in which organizations such as Amnesty International constantly fight to gain the release of prisoners of

conscience. Amnesty International welcomes the participation of adolescents in their organization, and so teachers may find it worthwhile to invite students to become involved in Amnesty fundraising or letter-writing campaigns. Students could also be encouraged to learn about the work of organizations that deal with battered wives syndrome by talking with a representative from a local women's crisis shelter. If they become sad at the thought of children in other countries being denied the opportunity to go to school, then they can visit Unicef's *Voices of Youth* website to read Article 28 of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which says that primary education should be free and compulsory for all children and that governments should make sure no one is excluded from education because of poverty. While the United Nations goal of education for all remains a distant dream for many children around the world, students can be given the opportunity to learn about what the world community is doing to improve access to education.

At the end of the first novel, Parvana and Shauzia must say goodbye to each other. Shauzia leaves Kabul to escape into Pakistan while Parvana plans to head north to Mazar-e-Sharif, where her family have gone to attend her sister's wedding. The second volume, *Parvana's Journey*, is devoted exclusively to Parvana, and the third volume, *Mud City*, focuses entirely upon Shauzia. Although the two heroines do

not meet up with each other after their parting at the end of *The Breadwinner*, they vow to find each other at the top of the Eiffel Tower twenty years hence, on the first day of spring. Throughout most of *The Breadwinner*, Parvana waits for her father to be released from prison, even though there is no way for her and her family to know if he is even alive. At the end of the book's penultimate chapter, she is finally reunited with her father, but he has clearly been weakened by his ordeal. It is, nevertheless, quite a shock to read, in the first sentence of *Parvana's Journey*, that "A man Parvana didn't know gave one final pat to the dirt mounded up over her father's grave" (9). The effort to walk with Parvana from Kabul to northern Afghanistan has proven to be too great a strain for her father and he dies from exhaustion and ill health. Thus, at the beginning of the second book of the trilogy, Parvana finds herself completely alone in a strange village with a long and perilous journey ahead of her.

During this quest Parvana faces many life-threatening situations. For instance, immediately after her father is buried, she learns from a girl in the village that some men are planning to sell her to the Taliban, so she makes her escape in the middle of the night. The desert through which she travels consists of bombed-out villages, derelict tanks on which children play, and minefields. Along the way she is accompanied by a baby boy named Hassan, who is orphaned after

his mother is killed by a bomb, an eight-year-old girl named Leila, who believes herself to be invincible when she walks through minefields in search of food, and a ten-year-old boy named Asif, who has had one of his legs blown off by a land mine.

In "Choosing Content and Methods for Teaching about International Conflict and Peace," Merry Merryfield and Richard Remy argue that "[t]eaching and learning are likely to be most effective when the teacher serves as coach and reflective practitioner and when the students are active learners who take responsibility for their own learning. In this process the student learns to be a researcher, thinker, decision maker, and meaning maker" (8). They then go on to say that, "If the study of international conflict management is to be addressed effectively in the classroom, students must understand how human differences in values, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, or economic development have been and continue to be the basis for conflict, discrimination, and aggression" (9). The complicated political, military, and religious conflicts in the Breadwinner trilogy may prove difficult, however, for students to untangle as they try to understand why Asif has lost a leg or why Hassan has become an orphan. As Merryfield and Remy suggest, teachers need to help adolescents to research for themselves the origins of the conflicts in Afghanistan. For instance, global educators can encourage their students to examine

differences in the values of Islamic fundamentalists and those of moderate Muslims such as Parvana's family. Students need to find out how and why various groups of people in the novels obey or resist the Taliban. In the second volume of the trilogy, military conflict leads to severe deprivation, particularly among the weakest members of society. In her description of the living conditions of Leila and her grandmother, Ellis provides a moving portrayal of the hardships the young and elderly endure. When Parvana, Asif, and baby Hassan first encounter Leila, she is living with her invalid grandmother on a run-down farm. Ellis's evocative prose at this point makes the effects of endless wars on the lives of these children painfully clear. Poor Leila lives next to a minefield, a no-man's land where bombed-out vehicles and corpses abound. To adult readers, the implications of this are obvious, but, if adolescents are to construct their own knowledge about the basis and significance of the conflicts that have ruined Leila's life, then, as Merryfield and Remy recommend, they need to be given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

One way for students to examine Leila's circumstances is to enter into this little girl's world through the use of their imaginations. As Werner observes, students' sense of hope can be strengthened if their imaginations are engaged in understanding their world: "Imagination is clarified and enlarged as it is

challenged in a context of alternatives...Visions can be created and shared through various avenues, including poetry, music, drama, dance, story, drawing and painting" (251). If adolescents are encouraged to produce drawings and paintings of Leila's farm before and after it is transformed through the children's hard work, then they may come to feel more deeply the struggle for peace that Ellis's writing symbolizes.

Students can begin to feel a sense of agency, as well, about the health conditions of children like Leila by informing themselves about the current situation of women and children in Afghanistan. One useful source of background information to help adolescents comprehend the difficult lives of women and children in Afghanistan is the AusAID Global Education website. At this site students can learn that years of conflict have brought about a decline in the health of the people of Afghanistan where the life expectancy is only about 45 years. When Parvana first meets Leila, the little girl's face is "covered in sores like the ones Parvana [has] seen on other children" (104). The AusAID site also points out that approximately "one quarter of the children die before their fifth birthday due to malnutrition, diarrheal diseases and other childhood diseases. Access to health care for women was severely restricted during the Taliban rule (1996-2001) and the number of women dying in childbirth is one of the highest in the world" (1). Students can then read in online magazines such as *The*

New Internationalist about how aid organizations are fighting children's diseases and starvation, and, if they wish, they can carry out a fundraising campaign in order to make a donation to one of these relief efforts.

At the end of *Parvana's Journey*, just as Parvana is being reunited with her family in a refugee camp, little Leila ventures once again into a minefield in search of food. This time, however, her good luck ends and she is killed by an exploding land mine. For some students, this is perhaps the most devastating event in the trilogy and warrants an effort on the part of teachers to help these individuals to interpret for themselves the significance of Leila's tragic death. As Werner points out, fostering efficacy or, in other words, encouraging the students to feel that they can have a positive influence in the world, is one way to help students to think about such tragedies. However, he argues that efficacy should not be

an add-on to studies of global issues, but should be part and parcel of the ongoing discussions [that] focus on the world-wide extent of agencies, partnerships and networks engaged in problem solving. Young people are not aware of the range of groups—whether governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, grass-roots community initiatives, or the private sector--committed to action and what they are do-

ing. The important understanding here is that the difficulties facing our globe are being worked on by many people in various ways. (252)

Realizing that help is now becoming available for children in Afghanistan who have lost limbs in land mine explosions can be a source of hope for adolescents who want to donate time or money to organizations such as the Save the Children Alliance.

Many organizations work with children who have been maimed by land mines. As the International Red Cross points out on its website, "Those under 15 account for an average of 5% of the amputees who are fitted with artificial limbs in the ICRC's orthotic and prosthetic workshops in Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Angola. Limb-fitting for children calls for closer monitoring than for adults; as a child continues to grow, so he or she needs to be seen every nine months to ensure that the prosthesis fits properly or is changed if necessary" (4). Donald Bragaw points out that "programs such as the Land Mines Education Project, of the Save the Children Alliance, established first in Kabul, Afghanistan, attempt to provide children and young adults with specific information about the nature of land mines, what they look like and what to do if one is seen. A series of activities and games is designed to help children learn the most common shapes, sizes and colors of land mines" (1). To help students to become interested in the issue

of land mine education, teachers could suggest that they pretend that they have lost an arm or a leg in a land mine explosion. Students could then write a journal entry about their lives before and after they lost the limb. Finally, groups of students could investigate the work of different organizations that are attempting to remove land mines in countries such as Cambodia, and they could then report their findings to the class.

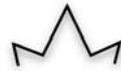
In his article, “Global Education: It’s Largely a Matter of Perspective,” Roland Case discusses what it means to cultivate a global perspective in adolescent students. Case believes that “a global perspective refers to a point of view or lens for viewing people, places and things around the world” (75). He points out that global education involves “specifying both the range of global phenomena to be explored (the objects—the substantive dimension) and the desired lenses through which the examination is to occur (the points of view—the perceptual dimension)” (76). The third volume of the Breadwinner trilogy, titled *Mud City*, provides teens with an excellent opportunity to explore the substantive dimensions and to examine the various points of view about many aspects of the lives of refugees and street kids in Pakistan. Some of

the issues dealt with by Ellis in *Mud City* include: the displacement of Afghans in refugee camps in Pakistan, orphans being forced to beg and to pick garbage in order to survive, street kids being thrown into prison for stealing, and the relative opulence of Western foreigners living in Pakistan. To consider

these issues from multiple perspectives, students need to develop cross-cultural awareness, a knowledge of global dynamics, and a awareness of human choices.

At the end of the first novel in the trilogy, Parvana and Shauzia quit their jobs in the Kabul market and go their separate ways: Parvana to northern Afghanistan and Shauzia to Peshawar in Pakistan. When Shauzia escapes from Kabul with Mrs. Weera, she soon becomes

tired of working to help her fellow women and children in the Mud City refugee camp and decides, instead, to run off to the nearby city of Peshawar in order to make some money so that she can realize her dream of emigrating to France. After she has many dangerous adventures among the street kids of Peshawar, Shauzia is eventually unfairly accused of being a thief and placed in prison. Just as Shauzia is beginning to lose hope of ever being released, an American engineer named Tom rescues her. As the



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students attempt to interpret this section of the novel, they need to think across cultures. Developing their cross-cultural awareness at this stage involves students in questioning some of their own cultural assumptions about, for example, the importance of protecting private property.

Tom's wife, Barbara, and their two young boys, Jake and Paul, are from Toledo in the U.S.A. Most adolescent readers will find it strange to view North American culture through Shauzia's eyes as she comes to live in Tom's house. For the first few days, Shauzia is certain that her life in this paradise will end very soon, and so she takes extra food and hides it in her room to prepare for the day when she expects to be cast onto the streets once more. One day while the family is away, Shauzia sees some beggars outside the gate of the house and she welcomes them in to share her good fortune. She assumes that Tom and Barbara's generosity will, of course, extend to these needy people as well. When the Americans return to their home to find that it has been taken over by street people, they decide that Shauzia must return to the refugee camp.

Having become accustomed by this point in the trilogy to viewing the world through the eyes of Shauzia, some young readers will feel a kind of culture shock as they watch two spoiled little American boys bickering over their toys, and as they observe a family eating bountiful meals in the security of

their own home. It is at this moment when Shauzia is expelled from Tom's and Barbara's paradise and driven in their minivan back to Mud City that the huge gap between her life circumstance and those of most North American children will become clear to many adolescent readers. Ellis has not portrayed Tom and Barbara as evil caricatures intended to inspire our disdain. Like many North Americans, they want to make the world a better place by reaching out to help a girl in need. But the fact that, in the end, Tom and Barbara choose to value their personal security and worldly possessions more than they value the life of Shauzia can spark a class discussion about their awareness of human choices. Teachers might wish to set up a debate about whether or not it is a good idea to welcome street people into their homes and to share their food and personal property with them.

Finally, to help enhance their students' knowledge of global dynamics, teachers could encourage them to construct a graphic organizer such as a web diagram in which they indicate the various relationships that exist between the levels of society in Pakistan. This web could show the relative status of the refugees, street kids, storeowners, police officers, hotel patrons, and Americans. As the students then examine Shauzia's interactions with members of each of these groups, they can begin to consider the interconnectedness of the business, government,

military, social, and criminal justice organizations locally within Pakistan and globally between Pakistan and the United States.

In *Re-mapping Literary Worlds: Postcolonial Pedagogy in Practice*, Ingrid Johnston observes that “the quest motif in many traditional Western narratives sees travelers leaving home on a journey of self-discovery, encountering obstacles along the way, learning from their experiences, and returning home having gained wisdom and maturity” (135). However, she then goes on to argue that, in postcolonial texts such as the Breadwinner trilogy, “Utopian dreams of the pleasures of travel are replaced by the ambiguities of exile, of migrancy, and of diasporic identities” (135-36). At the end of the first book, when Parvana and Shauzia are forced to part company and to leave Kabul in search of a better life, they share the dream of eventually escaping Afghanistan and meeting up with each other twenty years later at the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris on the first day of spring. But Parvana’s journey to Mazar-e-Sharif and Shauzia’s trip to Peshawar prove to be far from utopian or pleasurable.

As young readers share in the adventures and heartaches of these two girls, they will indeed have to learn to make sense of the ambiguities that Parvana and Shauzia feel in exile from Kabul. The students who read these books become in effect imaginary travellers themselves. However, this is not the type

of armchair travelling that they might experience by watching a National Geographic documentary. According to Johnston, as students learn to “engage in dialogue with other voices, both textual and personal, they begin to acknowledge the transforming potential of hybridity, recognizing the place of others in the world and reconsidering the existing languages of culture, identity, and power that have served as divisions in the world” (136). Here Johnston’s view of teaching bridges the global education and postcolonial theories of Werner, Case, Merryfield, Remy, Said, and Bhabha. She argues that students need to take part in a dialogue with each other and with the characters in Ellis’s trilogy in order to situate themselves in the imaginative borderlands between Afghanistan and Canada.

Of course, how individual readers respond to Ellis’s books will vary greatly according to their different cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds. While many students may share the view that the Taliban are straightforwardly evil, some may feel that it is, in fact, the girls who are wrong to dress up as boys and to defy authorities. While many students may feel genuinely horrified at the existence of bombs, guns, and torture in the novels, in this age of violent movies and videogames some readers may find the bloodshed and suffering in these books to be entertaining rather than upsetting. Johnston’s point, when applied to the Breadwinner trilogy, is that reading

these novels can provide students with the opportunity to reconsider their own perspectives about culture, identity, and power by learning to see the world through the eyes of Parvana and Shauzia. It is then up to their teachers to help students to think critically about these new and different perspectives.

Young readers are strongly influenced by the discourse communities that they inhabit in their daily lives and encounter in the media, so their responses to Ellis's books will vary widely. The goal of global educators is not to indoctrinate Canada's youth to come away from their reading of Ellis's books with a certain set of beliefs, for instance, about the Taliban. It is, instead, to educate them to think critically about

the lives of Parvana, Shauzia, and the many other characters in these novels, so that the conclusions that they draw in the end will be well informed and carefully considered. With the help of the Breadwinner trilogy, Canada's youth can begin to become aware of the pain felt not only by Parvana and Shauzia, but also by so many other young people in war-torn countries around the world. Ellis's tale, in the hands of global educators, need not lead adolescent students to despair. Instead, the courage and conviction of Shauzia and Parvana can motivate at least some of Canada's young adults to learn more about the nature of war and poverty in their world.

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