

Teachers' Notes by Leonie Manners

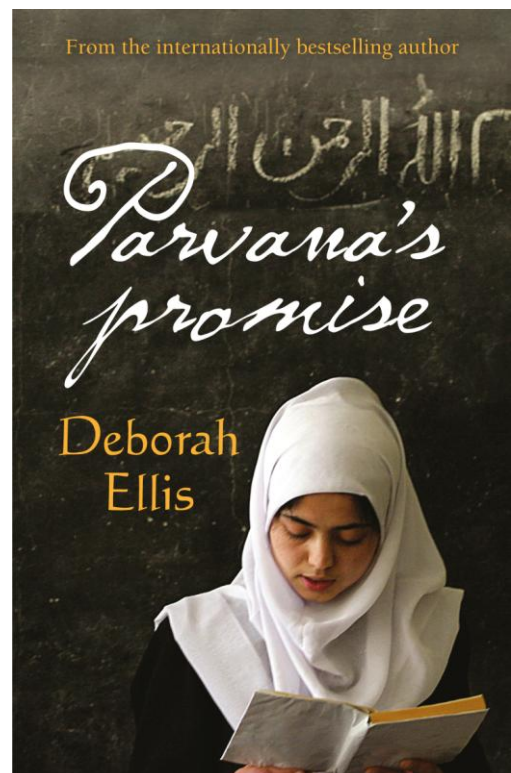
PARVANA'S PROMISE by Deborah Ellis

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Recommended for ages 11-14+ yrs

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INTRODUCTION

Parvana, the young girl who first stole our hearts back in 2002 as a victim of the Taliban, is now fifteen and living in post-Taliban Afghanistan. As the novel opens, Parvana is under arrest by the US-led coalition forces. She is suspected of being a terrorist working with the Taliban. As Parvana awaits her fate, she recalls the past four years of her life, working with her mother and sisters as they set up a school.

Like the original novel *Parvana* (2001), sequel *Parvana's Journey* (2002) and companion novel, *Shauzia* (2003), this novel explores the topical issues of conflict and justice in a field of war that itself continues to polarise public opinion and where grief, tragedy and hope mix in an uneasy alliance and the future is uncertain.

While the subject matter is anything but light, the author writes in a way that is totally accessible to young readers. Parvana is a character any student can relate to—feisty, self-willed, loyal, committed, resourceful and also practical joke-loving, cheeky, and with an intense dislike of fractions.

TEACHING THE NOVEL

Parvana's Promise can be read in conjunction with its prequels or as a stand-alone novel which highlights the challenges of the present-day post-Taliban period in Afghanistan.

Parvana's Promise is particularly topical for Australians. The events that are mentioned in the novel, while fictional, have been played out daily, painfully and in real-time, in our news coverage from Afghanistan. Bombs have been dropped on supposed Taliban/insurgent strongholds, only for the coalition forces to find that their unwitting victims were civilians, including women and children.

This series has tapped into the agony of many nations. A whole generation of young readers have grown up since the release of the first novel in 2002 and the young readers of *Parvana* are now themselves adults, the same age as some of those 1500 Australian soldiers still deployed in Afghanistan.

The sadness of lost lives, including Australian soldiers, casts a pall over our involvement in this war which became, with September 11, 2001, a 'war on terror'.

The recognition that Australian lives have been lost and families torn apart demands sensitivity and understanding in the teaching of this novel. Recognition, too, is due to the countless number of Afghani men, women and children who have been killed and displaced by this war, some of whom have made their way, against all odds, to our shores.

Australians and Afghans have all been touched irrevocably by this war. While a whole generation has grown up with Australia's involvement in Afghanistan and a new generation are discovering the *Parvana* novels, by 2014, when the last of Australia's troops are scheduled to return home, and the US also pull out, we will have known, no matter how close to the conflict we each came, that through the novels of Deborah Ellis, we have been there.

'I first discovered *Parvana* when I was 11. It gave me a better understanding of what was going on in Afghanistan and what children had to do in countries like this in order to survive. I feel like I have grown up with the *Parvana* novels. They have inspired me to want to do something in human rights protecting the millions of displaced children in the world.'

Arts/Law student, aged 21.

THEMES

The themes discussed in these notes are:

- Women's rights
- Human rights
- Value of education
- Cultural difference and understanding

These four themes point towards the major theme:

- Hope and its sustaining role in life's struggles

(The novel also presents opportunities to discuss the themes of:

- Friendship
- Migration, refugees and displacement)

PRE-READING

THE SETTING

Show students the map of Afghanistan at the end of the novel (p. 202). What are the major cities? Identify the capital.

Locate Afghanistan on a larger map of the world and on a relief atlas which shows geographic features such as mountain ranges. What continent does it belong to? From looking at the physical map, what five facts can students posit about the country?

- Landlocked nation
- Nearest sea is the Arabian Sea (to the South of Pakistan)
- Neighbouring countries: Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China
- Regional countries beyond immediate borders: India, Nepal, Russia
- Mountainous with many rivers

From these factors alone, what assumptions might students be able to make about the lives of Afghani people? Write these assumptions down. During the study of this novel, and as students find out more about Afghanistan, check back to see how correct these assumptions are.

From **research**, what other facts can students find out about Afghanistan's politics, religion and culture.

HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

To understand any zone of conflict it is important to have a sense of the history of a nation. (Deborah Ellis, in her Author's Note, provides a brief overview of the Taliban from 1996).

From ancient times, Afghanistan has experienced continual invasion from other empires, including the Greeks, Mongols, Turks and Uzbeks. Great conquerors including Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and Babur invaded Afghanistan to reach the subcontinent. Afghanistan became a crossroad for different cultures, languages and religions including Greek theism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

In 1747, Afghanistan became a separate state controlled by the Pashtuns (south and east) and Uzbeks (north).

The nineteenth century saw a long and drawn out struggle between the British and the Tsarist Russian empires for control over the territory. This fixed the borders but created divisions between Pashtuns and minority groups such as the Hazaras. After the third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, the Rawalpindi Treaty awarded the country the right to control its own foreign policy. A period of reforms was followed by civil war, due to the failure of a succession of monarchs and leaders to unite the disparate tribal and rural groups.

During the Cold War, economic and military aid flowed into Afghanistan from both the Western and the Soviet blocs. When the US began courting Pakistan as a Cold War ally, the Soviets stepped in to help former Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud overthrow the monarchy in July 1973. Daoud tried to impose a centralised government through building up the army but the army itself became subject to tribal and ethnic conflict, resulting in a Soviet-led coup d'état in April 1978. Afghanistan had become politically, militarily and economically reliant on the USSR.

Traditional, Islamic and largely rural Afghani groups reacted strongly against the communist reforms of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), and after a period of deep unrest, in 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, starting a decade of ground and air attacks, decimation of the countryside by mines, and the fleeing of five million refugees to camps in Pakistan and Iran.

1988, under the policy of *glasnost* initiated by new Soviet leader Gorbachev, saw the beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Kabul regime was close to collapse and, with a power vacuum in place, the Mujahedin, armed by the US and supported by Pakistan, stepped in to create an interim government. By 1994, with militias in control of the capital, Kabul became a divided city. In 1996, the Taliban – Afghani guerillas trained in Pakistan – shelled Kabul and formed a new government which imposed brutal and harsh restrictions on the population, in particular, targeting women and girls.

As a result of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the US led a coalition of nations, including Australia, into a war in Afghanistan, to hunt down the terrorists and return the country to peaceful and democratic rule. In 2005, the Taliban was defeated and a new constitution, president and parliament was elected. However, the emergence of the new government has been marked by sporadic outbreaks of conflict, between the government, insurgents and tribal warlords and disputes and disagreements with the occupying forces, over the handover of powers back to the Afghan authorities.

In April 2009, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said: 'We have an enduring commitment to the US under the ANZUS Treaty which was formally invoked at the time of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington.'

Ask students to find out about the ANZUS Treaty. What does this statement suggest about Australian and US relations — in Afghanistan, in the past and for the future?

THEMES

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The status of women in Afghanistan

When the Taliban in Afghanistan took control of Kabul in 1996, they 'imposed brutal and restrictive laws on girls and women. Schools for girls were closed down, women were no longer able to hold jobs, and strict dress codes were enforced.' (Author's Note). This was the context of the first novel in the series where a younger Parvana dressed herself as a boy in order to help her family survive. In *Parvana's Promise*, set in post-Taliban Afghanistan, Parvana is reunited with her mother and helps to run the school which they have founded.

Life is better it seems, but there are strong indications that the government is paying lip-service to education.

This novel raises clear questions about the rights of women and children. Around the world, women and girls in many countries are struggling in male-dominated societies, and against cultural practices that prohibit the participation of, restrict, and, in some cases (genital mutilation), even torture women.

Read aloud the articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and discuss how these rights translate to Afghanistan. How many of these rights have been violated in this novel?

'The average woman here lives only to forty-six.' (p. 23) Why is life expectancy so low in Afghanistan for women?

Women and politics

A study of the late nineteenth century suffragette movement ties in to the History and Society and Culture curriculum for lower secondary years. Ask your students to **research** the history of women's rights and make a timeline since the suffragette movement. Highlight the role of key leaders such as Emily Pankhurst. Discuss the role of Australia's feminist advocate, Germaine Greer, in the 1970s.

In Australia, when did women get the right to vote? Debate the topic: 'That women are treated equally in Australian society.' This topic provides ample scope to **discuss** equality regarding a range of issues—pay equality, career opportunities and progression, economic independence, political representation, social attitudes.

Parvana sees herself as Malali, the Afghan girl famous for leading Afghan troops into battle against the British in the nineteenth century. Students who have read *Parvana* will remember that Malali was the nickname Parvana's father gave her. A parallel figure of a contemporary political heroine is **Aung San Suu Kyi** of Burma. Study her involvement in the battle for democracy in Burma.

Ask students to **research** the life of **Malalai Joya** on the Internet. Malalai Joya is a real-life Parvana combining the qualities of Parvana, Mother and Mrs Weera, the parliamentarian Parvana turns to for help. Malalai Joya is an Afghan woman, human rights campaigner, political activist and parliamentarian who ran an underground school for girls during the Taliban period. She has been described as 'the bravest woman in Afghanistan.' In a recent interview in Australia, she spoke of how she chooses to wear the burqa in Afghanistan in order to disguise her identity after numerous attempts have been made on her life. Malalai Joya has written an autobiography, *Raising My Voice*, and is the subject of a documentary film, *A Woman Among Warlords* (in production in 2012).

HUMAN RIGHTS

Parvana is detained without a trial and subjected to increasing degrees of physical and psychological torture in these chapters. What is Parvana suspected of? **Make a list** of the Articles in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that are contravened in Parvana's treatment. (The Afghan judicial system recently ruled that the administrative detention of Afghani citizens, such as Parvana's detention, violates Afghani law—'Afghans reject detention without trial' *SMH*, September 18, 2012)

Amnesty International is an organisation set up to promote and defend human rights around the world. Ask students to **research** the history and scope of this organisation and some of the issues it is involved in. www.amnesty.org.au

Ask students to **consider** human rights in Australia, in particular, the issues of mandatory detention and Australia's treatment of refugees.

EDUCATION

Discuss the importance of education in general, and, in particular, in the context of the reconstruction of a nation like Afghanistan. Why does Parvana, while initially envious, support her sister's acceptance of the scholarship to New York?

How does Parvana's school differ from your school? How is it similar? Ask students to **draw or paint a map of the school** and its surrounds such as the vegetable garden, the refugee camp, the village and its dung huts, the market and the countryside with its opium fields and rocky hillsides. (pp. 48-49)

Why does the school receive threats? The saddest episode in the novel is when Parvana's mother is tortured and killed. (pp. 150 & 169-170) This will require some **discussion** about the ambivalence of the Afghan government's commitment to education.

Research on the Internet news articles about 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan who was shot while championing the education of girls in the Taliban-influenced Swat Valley of Pakistan, and compare these news articles with Parvana's story. Discuss how Deborah Ellis' novels combine both factual realism and fiction. Set students the task of imagining they are the director of a docu-drama based on *Parvana's Promise*. After **writing the film script** of one or two scenes, ask students to explain how they would, as director, film these scenes. Explore the importance of location, sets, lighting, camera angles, pace, music and special effects.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Discuss the Major's statement: 'We want to show respect for your culture while we are guests in your country, but I find it awfully hard to talk to someone when I can't see their face.' (p. 20) What do students think about this statement? In Afghanistan, does he have a right to impose his westernised view? What about France, where the wearing of the burqa has been banned (since April 2011) in a public place? **Compare** the Major's statement with the attitude of the male villagers to Parvana when her chador slips onto her shoulders. (pp. 54-55)

Parvana wears a chador. What is a chador? **Discuss** how dress can be a symbol of culture and tradition, a response to landscape and climate – for example, the 'djellabaya' worn by the Bedouins in the Saharan desert, and, in western cultures, a matter of personal choice.

The chador is also a symbol of this freedom and while Parvana claims the law says she does not need to wear it, the male villagers claim this is the law of the foreigners, to which Parvana retorts: 'You are all living in the past!' (p. 56) To what extent is the conflict in Afghanistan a clash between the past and old traditions and the present and Afghanistan's enforced progress towards democracy?

THE POWER OF HOPE – BUILDING THE FUTURE

The theme of hope is dramatized in this novel by an increased use of **symbolism**. Study of this theme can be linked to a study of symbolism in literature.

The school symbolically represents hope in the novel, which is climaxed with Parvana's symbolic act of painting the word SCHOOL on the roof of the school, under cover of darkness.

Why is Leila's Academy of Hope so named? (Leila is the orphaned girl who loves flowers in *Parvana's Journey* and who dies in a minefield.)

Consider: 'We're starting from scratch ... We have a chance to create a system that will raise a new type of Afghan child, a child with big expectations and with the confidence to rebuild the country.' (p. 32) What role does the school play in the novel? Ask students to **design a crest or logo** to go alongside the school's sign.

Make a mind map of the characters, who they are and the qualities they represent that the school supports. Put Leila's Academy of Hope and Parvana's mother and Parvana at the centre. Include:

•Nooria	•Hanifa
•Maryam	•Sharifa
•Asif	•Farah
•Hassan	•Ava
•Mr Fahir	•Badria
•Mrs Zaher	•Kinnah and the baby

Parvana's Wall of Achievement honours girls and women doing great things in Afghanistan. Why do you think it was so important for Parvana to acknowledge these achievements?

Consider erecting a wall of achievement in your classroom to recognise students and their achievements.

Why does Parvana (and Shauzia) dream of lavender fields in France and the Eiffel Tower? What do these dreams represent in terms of the novel? Ask students to **create counter-posing sketches** of the Eiffel Tower and French lavender fields versus sketches of Parvana's daily life in Afghanistan.

Ask students what they think is the significance of Parvana's painting of the word SCHOOL on the roof of the school under cover of darkness. Why is it so important that Parvana keeps the legacy of the school alive? After reading Chapter Twenty-Six, have students **dramatise this empowering scene**, through performing impromptu dramatic monologues of this scene to the class. What thoughts are going through Parvana's head? Create a darkened classroom using black sheets to cover windows and a torchlight to create the effect of the moon. The only props needed are a ladder, paintcan and paintbrush and a card for holding the finished sign.

Green Valley (pp. 77 & 178) is a reference to Panjshir Valley, a mountain oasis and secure province north of Kabul, a point of pride for Afghans where they resisted Soviet occupation and where rusting shells of Soviet tanks have been used to reinforce irrigation channels, creating lush orchards. Green Valley is also referred to in *Parvana's Journey*, where the refugee children clean up Green Valley and find a house in a minefield to live in. Parvana fears the school has been destroyed like Green Valley, until she realises that, although physically bombed, the school lives on in the spirit of its students, who continue in their commitment to education, despite the destruction of the building.

Mrs Weera **represents** the future of Afghanistan in terms of the parliamentary and democratic process. She is a leader who is able to marshal the support of international organisations. Shauzia, who Parvana is reunited with in this novel, also represents the future, working in an organisation which rescues women and provides safe refuges. To what extent will the re-building of Afghanistan depend on characters like these, who, like Shauzia, can affirm: 'Living is dangerous ... But we're all brave, aren't we?' (p. 188)

After the school is bombed and Parvana returns to the school, she finds the school sign smashed, with HOPE the only word left intact. Consider this significance, together with the question which ends the novel: 'This is Afghanistan ... What do you want — a happy ending?' Do students think the novel ends on a message of hope? After reading the Author's Note, **discuss** what students think of the author's view of Afghanistan's future and the role of the international community.

STUDY OF LITERATURE

TEXTS

These texts are mentioned in *Parvana's Promise*, and could be studied as associated reading:

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (this novel originally belonged to Parvana's father, who died of sickness and malnutrition at the hands of the Taliban. When Asif, Hassan and Parvana are starving in *Parvana's Journey*, they try to eat pages of the novel).

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

Poetry of Robert Frost: 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'

Reviews of the Canadian edition, titled *My Name is Parvana*

'In a follow-up that turns the Breadwinner Trilogy into a quartet, 15-year-old Parvana is imprisoned and interrogated as a suspected terrorist in Afghanistan...The interrogation, the words of the notebook and the effective third-person narration combine for a thoroughly tense and engaging portrait of a girl and her country. This passionate volume stands on its own, though readers new to the series and to Ellis' overall body of work will want to read every one of her fine, important novels.'

– *Kirkus' Review* Sept 1st, 2012 (USA)

'Parvana's character sparkles and enlivens this grim tale. All Parvana wants is to go to school and to have her family safe. Once that is achieved, though, Parvana is surprised at how unsettled and angry she is... Ellis creates a great character in Parvana, gradually unfolding Parvana's strengths as she struggles along through the idealism and high emotion of adolescence...Alternating chapters between Parvana's imprisonment and torture by foreign forces and the events of the last four years creates taut tension and sweeps the reader along. Pages will be turned eagerly, and it will be impossible to put *My Name is Parvana* down once it is started. Both boys and girls will be fascinated and compelled to read this harrowing tale.'

– *CM Magazine*, Vol XIX No. 1, Sept 7th, 2012 (University of Manitoba, Canada)

'A riveting page-turner, Deborah Ellis's new novel is at once harrowing, inspiring and thought-provoking. And, yes, in the end, Parvana is reunited with her childhood friend, Shauzia.'

– <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13584773-my-name-is-parvana>

Interviews with the author:

See "Canadian YA Author Deborah Ellis on Telling Stories and Giving Back' in Publishing Perspectives 30th May 2012. (It uses the Canadian titles of Deborah Ellis's books, which sometimes are different to the Australian titles. It also displays the Canadian cover.)

<http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/05/canadian-ya-author-deborah-ellis-on-telling-stories-and-giving-back/>

Two older interviews are available at:

<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/authors/experts/dellis.asp> (reprinted from the Friends of the CCBC Newsletter 2005, Number 1 with permission ©2005 Friends of the CCBC, Inc)

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/profiles/ellis.html> (University of Manitoba, Canada, 2003)

A collection of answers to children's FAQs can be found at:

www.allenandunwin.com/uploads/documents/DeborahEllis.pdf

SETTING THE SCENE

Chapter One

Read aloud the first chapter.

Where is this first chapter set? Parvana has been arrested and is interrogated in this first chapter. Who has arrested her and why? 'She was picked up in an abandoned ruin that used to be a school. We suspect that it was being used as a staging area for the Taliban to launch attacks against us, and our intelligence-gathering among the villagers seems to confirm that, although no one will speak openly.' **Discuss** how this sets the scene for what is about to unfold in the novel.

Ask students to **consider and discuss**:

- How Parvana copes with the interrogation
- How the male army figure (the Major) relates to the female corporal
- The significance of the book Parvana has in her backpack. In what ways does *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee mirror the situation in this novel?
- The power of the use, and the denial of use, of language. What language does Parvana speak? Find out about the other languages of Afghanistan.

Chapter Two

What does this chapter tell the reader about life in Afghanistan, as observed by Parvana in her prison cell?

The paragraph: 'Blue, she thought. A bright blue, the colour of the sky on a brilliant winter morning before the clouds rolled in from the mountains. She would add a few splashes of red here and there' is very painterly in its description. Have students **paint** the scene of the mountains and the poignancy of Parvana's red shalwar kameez fluttering away in the market: 'Her last splash of childhood, sold to a stranger.' (pp. 13-14)

Discuss how tension is built, through the use of techniques such as alliteration, simile, repetition and stark emotional language in the following:

'She finally backed away on her own, leaving him screaming at the sky.' (p. 16)

'She could feel the loneliness coming off him in waves, and she shut herself against it.' (p. 16)

'She knew she could not trust them. All she could trust was herself.' (p. 17)

'Afghanistan already had plenty of lost minds, floating like invisible balloons in the air above the land, leaving behind empty-minded people moaning and lonely in the dirt.' (p. 17)

Discuss how students **interpret** the meaning of: 'Did a word like revenge have any real meaning in a country like Afghanistan?' (p. 16)

THE PRISON (Chapters Three, Five, Seven, Nine, Eleven, Thirteen, Sixteen, Nineteen, Twenty-Four, Twenty-Eight)

These chapters are confronting as they show Parvana being subjected to violent treatment and interrogation at the hands of her captors. **Discuss** how the author cleverly embeds her own views through satirical dialogue to stress the 'ridiculous' amount of force used 'for one little girl'. The author also dispels the fear to some extent by depicting Parvana as a strong character. What qualities does Parvana have? Ask students to **write a list** of the ways in which Parvana's physical and emotional life is similar to, and different from, their own.

What is the effect of the repetition, punctuation and spacing in the last lines of Chapter Three?

'Then the man said, 'Take her chair away.'

Parvana was made to stand.

And stand.

And stand. (p. 25)

STRUCTURE

Twelve of the 28 chapters of this novel are set while Parvana is in detention reflecting on the past four years of her life. From chapters 3 - 13, each alternate chapter is set in Parvana's prison cell. Chapters 16, 19, 24, 28 are also set in the prison cell, however, these chapters are more spread out towards the end of the novel, which has the effect of opening up the novel and giving intimations of freedom and hope. The other chapters are set within the school Parvana's mother set up, Leila's Academy of Hope.

After studying this novel, return to the structure and ask students to discuss the effect of the **alternating contexts** — from a prison cell to school setting. Discuss how one context isolates the human personality and the other expands and nurtures it.

The shifts in time, slipping between the present and past, from arrest and detention to Parvana's flashbacks on her past life, challenge the reader to question what is normal, what is real and what is right, in a world where so much is frightening. **How does this structure also affect the tension created in the novel?**

POETRY

Fiction and poetry are held in high esteem by Parvana and, in her darkest times, she turns to words—books, scraps of nursery rhymes and poetry, even reading the words on food parcels. Read Robert Frost's, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, which could not depict a setting more different from Afghanistan: 'the woods are lovely, dark and deep.'

Paint a diptych of a scene from dusty Afghanistan and a scene from snowy USA to reflect this difference. (*Mirror* is a picture book by Jeannie Baker which shows the connections and differences between life in Morocco and life in Sydney, and would be useful to study as a comparative text in this context). Words allow Parvana to make the cultural connections that help her to survive and triumph in the face of adversity. The author clearly sees words, in some form, as salvation: 'Who would want to shoot somebody after reading 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' or 'Casey at the Bat'? ... 'Hey you!' the soldier would shout out to whoever they were supposed to be killing. 'I've just read a great poem. Let me read it to you. You're going to love it!' (p. 65)

Poetry has long been associated with freedom and the act of writing has sustained prisoners for centuries. In 2007, an anthology of poems written by political prisoners in Guantanamo Bay was published. The inmates communicated their thoughts to each other by using pebbles to etch words on foam cups which were then passed from cell to cell. Pass a foam cup around the classroom. Ask students to contribute one word or line to a joint class poem called 'Cup of Dreams'. When the cup has gone round every class member, **work together on creating a poem** by ordering the words and lines.

Make a list of the favourite poems of students in your class and **find unusual ways of promoting these poems**, to the rest of the school. You may wish to have a 'Poetry in the Playground' performance day, where students write their poems on placards to leave by trees or recite poems from unexpected places such as in the foliage, the water bubblers, the school oval. Some students may wish to perform songs, poems set to music.

LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE AND MEDIA

Over the course of your study of this novel, ask the class to **collect media articles** including newspaper, magazine and online articles about Afghanistan. Track the progress of the situation in Afghanistan in the news. Use the articles to **discuss** the following questions:

- What is the article about?
- What questions does the article raise?
- Analyse** the language used. Is the language reasoned or objective or are there some emotional or pejorative words used? Are there words students don't know the meaning of? Make lists of these words.
- Is the article a statement of fact or observation or is it written to persuade? What makes students think this?
- Do students feel media coverage of Afghanistan is fair and unbiased?
- How much space is given to the news article about Afghanistan compared to other news articles in this publication or online site?

CONTEXTUAL LANGUAGE

The novel introduces Afghani language and culture seamlessly within the text. Discuss the meaning of the following words with students:

chowkidar p 29

nan p 42

toshak p 51

Shalwar Kameez p62

surah p64

Qur'an p64

ABOUT THE WRITERS

DEBORAH ELLIS

Deborah Ellis is a Canadian author who has achieved international acclaim with her courageous works that give a voice to, and an insight into, the plight of children growing up in war-torn and developing countries. She is best-known for her Parvana series, which has been published around the world, and raises money for Women for Women in Afghanistan and Street Kids International. She has won a number of international awards. Her books include:

Parvana (2001)

Parvana's Journey (2002)

Shauzia (2003)

Looking for X (2003)

A Company of Fools (2004)

The Heaven Shop (2005)

Three Ashes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak (2005)

Diego, Run! (2007)

Diego's Pride (2008)

Off to War: Soldiers' Children Speak (2009)

Children of War: Iraqi Children Speak (2009)

No Safe Place (2011)

The Best Day of My Life (2012)

Deborah Ellis was raised in a small town called Paris in southern Ontario. She finished high school there, then lived for a while in Ottawa and Toronto. A long-time feminist and anti-war activist, her hobbies include riding her bike, poking around in the woods, and exploring new places and ideas.

In addition to writing and researching her books, Deborah works as a mental health counsellor in Toronto. She began writing the *Parvana* books, about a young girl living in Afghanistan, after visiting refugee camps in Pakistan. All of the royalties from the sale of the books are donated to Women for Women in Afghanistan to support educational projects for Afghan girls in refugee camps in Pakistan. Since then, she has travelled the world to meet with and hear the stories of children affected by poverty, war, racism and illness. Her fiction and non-fiction books give us a glimpse into the lives of children from Afghanistan (*The Parvana Trilogy*), Bolivia (*Diego, Run!*, *Diego's Pride*), the Middle East (*Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*) and Southern Africa (*The Heaven Shop*). *Off to War: Soldiers' Children Speak* and *Children of War* are collections of interviews with children of Canadian and American soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Her companion book is *Children of War: Iraqi Children Speak*.

In 2010 Deborah Ellis received The Ontario Library Association President's Award for Exceptional Achievement.

LEONIE MANNERS

A former English and History teacher, Leonie has spent the majority of her life reading, studying, teaching, reviewing, assessing, selecting or marketing literature, with a career in children's book publishing, bookselling, teaching and freelance writing and editing. A long-time fan of Deborah Ellis and her writing, she recognised the heart-breaking power of the original *Parvana* novel when it crossed her desk in manuscript form many years ago.

'It was the first novel in what became a genre of novels that dealt with the struggle of children to survive in war-torn and impoverished nations. It was brave and it was real, as girls just like *Parvana* were fighting for survival in Afghanistan. For my daughter and countless other readers, who were the same age at the time, it was an empathetic window into another girl's life in a tragic area of conflict. It is testament to the power of Deb Ellis's novels that new generations of young readers are discovering them.'