

The Breadwinner

Countries have been trying to take over Afghanistan for many years because Afghanistan is located in an important spot. In 1979, Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union (the Soviet doesn't exist today, but it's basically the country of Russia). The U.S. and Soviet Union hated each other. Both countries had thousands of nuclear missiles pointed at each other and it was very tense (we call that time period The Cold War). Since we hated the Soviet Union, we gave Afghanistan billions of dollars and weapons to help them defeat the Soviets. Eventually, the Soviets lost and they left Afghanistan in 1989. After the Soviet Union left, nobody really knew who should run Afghanistan or what kind of government they would have. Several different groups in Afghanistan had a Civil War to see who would control the country. In the end, a group called the Taliban won. The Taliban were VERY strict. People had very few rights. Women had almost no rights, they couldn't go to school, drive cars, go outside without a man or talk in public. Women could be beaten or executed if they did any of those things.

The Breadwinner starts after the Soviet Union has left and after the civil war happened. The book begins a few years after the Taliban have taken over the country.

3 **The Breadwinner: A STUDY GUIDE**



How to use the study guide:

- Read the questions for each chapter BEFORE you read the novel.
- Look for the answers as you read making sure to highlight the passages in the novel that assist you in answering the study guide questions.
- Highlight in your text any quotations noted in the study guide.
- Respond to the study guide questions in COMPLETE SENTENCES. You should write at least two-three thoughtful sentences for each question.

CHAPTER ONE (p.7-18)

1. Why does Parvana have to hide her face and voice when she goes to the marketplace with her father? What will happen if she doesn't?
2. How old is Parvana? How is age significant for a girl living in a society governed by the Taliban?
3. How does Parvana initially feel about not being able to go to school? What does Nooria understand about this situation that Parvana does not?
4. How does Parvana's father currently make a living for the family? Why has he chosen this as his occupation?

5. Describe the living conditions Parvana and her family currently exist in. Compare them to the family's previous living situation.

6. What is the Taliban? Describe the restrictions they place on the people of Kabul.

CHAPTER TWO (p. 19-33)

1. Explain the mixed emotions Parvana feels about carrying water for her family.

2. Explain who Hossain is.

3. **“How can we be brave?” Nooria asked. ‘We can’t even go outside.’
‘There are many types of battles,’ Father said quietly.” (29)**

Explain what Father means in the above quotes. How does he want his daughters to be brave?

4. **“As the soldiers pried her loose, she heard her father say, ‘Take care of the others, my Malali.’ Then he was gone.” (31)**

Who is Malali? Why does Parvana’s father call her that and ask her to care for the others?

5. **“Father’s books! ...Some were English books about history and literature. They were kept hidden because the Taliban burned books they didn’t like.” (32)**

What does this quote explain about the Taliban and the difficult position Parvana’s father would have been in once they took power in Afghanistan?

6. Why do you believe the Taliban took Parvana’s father away?

CHAPTER THREE (p. 34-43)

1. List the ways the Taliban restricts the movement, dress and behavior of women and girls as noted in the novel thus far.

2. Why was the act of Parvana and her mother traveling to the prison to find Father such a difficult one?

3. How do Parvana and her mother attempt to get her father out of prison and what is the result?

4. **“Helping Mother down the broken stairs was a little like helping Father, as the billowing burqa made it hard for her to see where she was going.” (39)**

What does this passage imply about the impact of a burqa on the movement and daily activity of a woman? Why would the Taliban desire such an impact?

CHAPTER FOUR (p. 44-53)

1. **“If we had left Afghanistan when we had the chance, I could be doing my work!”**

‘We are Afghans. This is our home. If all the educated people leave, who will rebuild the country?’” (45)

Parvana says this is an argument her parents frequently have. Explain her mother’s side of the argument and her father’s side of the argument. Why is their’s such a difficult position to be in?

2. Why is Parvana the only member of the family who can go out and purchase food while her father is in prison?

3. **“Now I’ve got her, Parvana thought. I can make her as miserable as she makes me. But she was surprised to find that this thought gave her no pleasure. Maybe she was too tired and too hungry. Instead of turning her back, she took the money from her sister’s hand (53).**

This quotation points to the ongoing conflict between the sisters. Explain why Parvana initially thinks she will be able to make Nooria miserable.

Discuss why you believe that thought does not give Parvana any pleasure.

CHAPTER FIVE (p. 54-62)

7. Parvana begins to change once her father has been put in prison. Characterize the change that begins to occur in Parvana. **What** does she do that shows this change and explain **why** she is changing.

8. Who is Mrs. Weera and why is her visit to Parvana's family so important?

CHAPTER SIX (p. 63-73)

1. **"They were going to turn her into a boy" (63).** Explain the plan Mrs. Weera and the family come up with. Why must Parvana make the final decision if the plan was to work.
2. When Parvana goes out in the street dressed as a boy she feels different. Explain the difference in her feelings and why this is so.

3. The important characters in *The Breadwinner* are...(list five and a brief description of each)

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

CHAPTER SEVEN (p. 74-82)

1. Parvana reads a letter for a Talib. What is surprising about his reaction to the letter? Why?

CHAPTER EIGHT (p. 83-94)

1. Why does Mrs. Weera move in with Parvana and her family?

2. What excellent idea does Parvana have regarding her freedom as a boy and how she can help her mother and sister? Why might Nooria object to the idea?

3. What does Parvana discover about the blacked-out window? Make a prediction about what might happen later in the novel in relation to the window.

CHAPTER NINE (p. 95-103)

1. **Describe** the conditions of Shauzia’s life (family, work, home). Why might it be helpful to Parvana to know about the difficulties of another girl her age?
2. In this chapter, plans for the magazine and a school for girls begin to develop. What are the plans and why are such conversations so important for Parvana, Mother, Mrs. Weera and Nooria?

CHAPTER TEN (p. 104-113)

1. What do the girls decide to do to make more money? Why do you think Parvana has trouble morally with the idea of this money-making scheme?
2. When Parvana has to go to the bathroom in the middle of the day, she is very scared. Explain why. What would you have done in her place?

CHAPTER ELEVEN (p. 114-122)

1. Why does Parvana cry when she returns from the graveyard? Is she being immature?
2. Why does Parvana want to continue digging up bones?
3. What gift drops on Parvana's head in this chapter?

4. Why does Parvana feel that arguing with Nooria just doesn't make sense any more?

5. Parvana can't stand to eat her nan at lunch and gives it to a beggar instead. What does this action reveal about Parvana? What does she recognize about food in their society?

6. The girls decide to go sell their goods at a soccer match. When they get to the stadium, they see something very different from a soccer match going on. What do they witness?

CHAPTER TWELVE (p. 123-134)

1. Mother's reaction to the events at the soccer stadium are "**What century are we living in?**" (123). What does she mean when she says this?

2. **“No one said anything to Parvana when the bread ran out, but she got up and went to work that day anyway. Some things just had to be done” (124).** What does this passage reveal about Parvana, especially in comparison to her behavior at the beginning of the novel?

3. Shauzia tells Parvana she has a plan to leave. Parvana wonders how she can leave her family. What do both girls struggle with at the prospect of fleeing Afghanistan? Why does Shauzia feel like a bad person?

4. Parvana’s sense of what is “normal” has changed. Explain this change.

5. Explain how Nooria and Mrs. Weera starting the school for girls is a form of resistance against the Taliban.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN (p. 135-143)

1. Why does Nooria decide to marry a man she hardly knows? What will the benefits of the union be?
2. Parvana refuses to go to Mazar for the wedding yet she sulks when her mother decides not to take Parvana with her. Explain why Parvana might feel such mixed emotions.
3. As Nooria leaves, Parvana teases her. A change in their relationship is evident. Explain how things used to be and how they are now as the two sisters anticipate being separated. Why do you believe this change has come about?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN (p. 144-154)

1. What kind and courageous act does Parvana carry out in this chapter?

2. Describe what the Kabul of the past was like.

3. Why does Parvana think of herself as “Malali leading the troops through enemy territory?” (148).

4. What terrible news does Parvana receive once Homa has rested, eaten and is able to speak? Why would she not have heard about this before?

5. How does Parvana respond to this news? Why do you think she deals with the situation this way?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN (p. 155-166)

1. Parvana begins to feel better in this chapter. What is the source of her new sense of purpose and hope?

