

Study Guide for *Mud City*

Note: Be sure to check all websites listed in this Study Guide to ensure suitability for your class.

Getting Started

- Have students each research two facts about Afghanistan (e.g., languages, religion, population, area, capital, life expectancy, literacy rate, monetary unit, flag, geographical features, climate, historical information, art, architecture, music, media). Have volunteers compile the information for a “Quick Facts” sheet or a bulletin board display.
- Read the Author’s Note (pages 159–162) for background information and context.
- Provide information about the author, Deborah Ellis, from online interviews, videos and the About the Author section on the final page of *Mud City*.
- Display a series of maps of Afghanistan and have students consider its geographical features such as its landlocked situation, bodies of water, regions, major cities and bordering countries. Have them discuss the effects of these features on the people who live there. Have them also figure out where it is relative to your latitudinal location, and its size compared with your province or state.
- Have students view photo essays or other collections of photographs of Afghanistan and have them discuss their responses with a partner or small group.
- If students have not read the first two books in the series, explain that *Mud City* is the third in a series of four novels set in Afghanistan featuring Parvana and her family and friends. Read students the synopses of the first two novels, *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana’s Journey* found at the end of *Mud City*. Explain that *Mud City*’s protagonist is Shauzia, Parvana’s friend.

Questions for Discussion/Writing

Chapter One

1. Skim the chapter and brainstorm a list of everything you learn about Shauzia. What do you think of her so far?
2. The first two novels and the fourth novel in the series take place in Afghanistan. What is the setting of this novel?

Sample websites for facts on Afghanistan:

[The Central Intelligence Agency / The World Factbook](#)

[Compton’s Britannica](#)

[The Beacon of Hope for Afghan Children Society](#)

[Afghanistan: The Harrison Forman Collection](#)

[Women for Women: Afghanistan](#)

For information about the author, Deborah Ellis, see:

[The Power of One Voice: An Interview with Deborah Ellis](#)

[Deborah Ellis Profile](#)

[Video Clip: Deborah Ellis Reads at Who Will Speak for the Child](#)

[Video Clip: Deborah Ellis interviewed by Shannon Skinner on Extraordinary Women TV](#)

See the maps on pages 6–7 of the book, and encourage students to refer to them as they encounter place names during their reading.

For a collection of photos, see: [Afghanistan Image Gallery](#)

For a photo essay, see: [Hell of a Nation: Photo Essay](#)

Have students begin a character profile of Shauzia (or add to it if they have already created one for *The Breadwinner*). They can add to the profile throughout the novel study.

3. What work does Mrs. Weera do in the refugee camp? What does Shauzia think of Mrs. Weera?
4. What did you already know about the Taliban before reading this chapter? What did you learn about them while reading this chapter?
5. How would you describe the refugee camp? What are the conditions?

Chapter Two

1. Why is Shauzia so angry at Mrs. Weera? What do you think about her anger?
2. What character traits does Mrs. Weera have? Have you ever met anyone who is like her? Why would she be effective as a leader in the camp?
3. Skim the first two chapters and list all the support and services that the camp provides to women.
4. Why might Shauzia's dream of going to France be so important, considering her circumstances?
5. Why does Shauzia disguise herself as a boy? Why does she leave in the middle of the night?

Chapter Three

1. What differences and similarities does Shauzia notice between Peshawar and the other places she has lived — Kabul and the pastureland in Afghanistan?
2. What kind of work does Shauzia see the young boys doing? What job does Shauzia get? How do you think you would feel if you had to do any of those jobs?
3. Where do Shauzia and Jasper sleep for the night?

Chapter Four

1. What are the various jobs that Shauzia does? What must she buy with some of her money? What does she do with the rest of it?
2. What does “Each night, she was a little bit closer to the sea” (page 50) mean?
3. What would Shauzia's life be like if she didn't have Jasper?

See pages 56–59 of *The Breadwinner*, where readers are first introduced to Mrs. Weera.

Read the Author's Note (pages 159–62) for background information on the Taliban. See also “Sara, 17” (page 112) in *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-ending War* by Deborah Ellis for another account of life under Taliban rule.

A common theme in all books in the series is the work of Afghan women in supporting one another and creating opportunities for education. See “Faranoz, 14,” (page 14) “Sigrullah, 14,” (Page 129) and “Sara, 17” (page 112) in *Kids of Kabul* for examples. See also Shuhada, [Shuhada Organization](#)

Shauzia's dream of seeing the lavender fields in France appears throughout the series. See pages 125–26 of *The Breadwinner* and page 173 of *Parvana's Journey*. Shauzia and her friend Parvana's promise to meet in Paris one day also recurs; see page 197 of *My Name Is Parvana* for its conclusion.

See “Aman, 16” (page 25) in *Kids of Kabul* for an account of child labor in Afghanistan.

For a report and facts on child labor, see this page on the Free the Children website:

[Free the Children: Child Labour](#)

4. What challenges and dangers does Shauzia face by living on the streets? Imagine yourself in that position — how would you feel? How would you cope?

Chapter Five

1. “The world was full of nasty-tempered adults, and what she really wanted was to never have to see any of them again” (page 55). What would you say to Shauzia about this, if you could?
2. Which part of this chapter did you find most disturbing? Most visible in your imagination? Most interesting in revealing Shauzia’s character?
3. The chapter ends, “Jasper was their watchdog, and he kept them safe” (page 67). Who should be responsible for keeping the children safe? What should the worries of children your age be?

Chapter Six

1. There are signs that Shauzia’s behavior and attitudes have changed a bit since she first came to Peshawar. What signs do you notice? Why do you think Shauzia has changed? How has she stayed the same?
2. The burger stand owner is the second man in the novel who gives food to the dog but not to Shauzia. Why do you think people act this way?
3. What happens to Shauzia at the end of the chapter? What do you think will happen next?

Chapter Seven

1. Shauzia thinks that having no food in the cell is “the least of her worries” (page 88). What are her bigger worries at this point? Describe how you feel about Shauzia in this chapter.
2. “Anger was good. Fear was dangerous” (page 84). What has brought Shauzia to the point of believing this?

Chapter Eight

1. How did the man manage to get Shauzia out of prison?

Note that *Parvana’s Journey* has a similar theme of children being mistreated by adults (see pages 82–88 about the children being cheated by a man). The whole series presents the theme of children as victims of adults’ refusal or inability to protect them and create a safe world for them.

For information on street children and the dangers they face, see this UNESCO site: [UNESCO Street Children](#)

For a UNICEF article about child imprisonment, in reference to Articles 37 and 40 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child, see: [Children in Conflict with the Law](#)

The portrayal of mental illness is a recurring theme throughout the series, beginning with Parvana’s mother’s depression in chapter four of *The Breadwinner* and repeated in *Parvana’s Journey* (pages 27–29) and also in *My Name Is Parvana* (page 25).

2. “Shauzia’s anger bounced around inside her, with no way to get out” (page 94). Have you ever felt that way? Why is it an effective description? What are some other examples of the author’s use of figurative language that you have found effective?
3. What new characters do we meet in this chapter? Describe who they are, where they live, and how their lives differ from Shauzia’s.
4. Barbara says that they moved to Pakistan because “we like a bit of adventure” (page 98). Why might this be offensive to someone like Shauzia?

Chapter Nine

1. Why does Shauzia put food under her bed? What does it tell you about the way she sees her life?
2. What do you think of Shauzia’s invitation to strangers to come into the house? Why does she think it’s the right thing to do? Did you predict that the family would react as they did?
3. Where is the irony in Tom and Barbara telling Shauzia about the refugee camp? What do we, the readers, know about the refugee camp that Tom and Barbara do not?
4. Barbara offers to keep Jasper. What are her reasons? Why do you think the author included this part?
5. Has Shauzia given up on her dream? How else does she show resilience in this chapter? What would you say to her at this point in her life, if you could?

Chapter Ten

1. In the first few pages of this chapter, Jasper seems to tell Shauzia what he thinks of her thoughts and actions. Describe the three different times he reacts to her.
2. “Sometimes it was hard to know the right thing to do.” Explain how this line from page 127 is illustrated by Shauzia throughout this chapter.
3. What do you think the United Nations water pump would look like? What do you know about the UN and other organizations that provide aid to refugees?

For an article on world hunger and the World Food Programme, see [World Food Programme: World Hunger](#)

To reinforce the sentence “She didn’t need them to take care of her” (page 116), explore the following websites for examples of aid organizations that were initiated and are run by Afghan people:

[Afghanistan Youth Center](#)

Nazo Ana Library for Women - [The Story of a Successful Library Project for Women](#)

[Afghanistan Book House](#)

[Shuhada Organization](#)

You might read one of the letters that Parvana wrote to Shauzia from her IDP camp to compare the girls’ experiences. See *Parvana’s Journey* (pages 176–78).

See the following site for information about the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

[Access to Water in Refugee Situations](#)

Chapter Eleven

1. Why is there not enough flour and other food in the camp?
2. Why do the people turn into a “raging crowd” (page 134)? What happens to Shauzia? What do you predict will happen next?

Chapter Twelve

1. How does the character of Mrs. Weera add a touch of humor to the novel? How does she provide a sense of hope?
2. Think of a clinic or hospital you have been in. How does the camp clinic compare? Why aren't Shauzia's injuries considered to be very serious?
3. What happened to the woman beside Shauzia in the clinic? Where was she when she was attacked?
4. What is Shauzia's plan at the end of the chapter? Do you think she'll be able to follow through?

Chapter Thirteen

1. Shauzia gets lost and comes across the area for new arrivals at the camp. How do the conditions there compare with those in the Widows' Compound?
2. What is the reference to “what happened in New York City”(page 149)? What point does the author make with the sentence “The people they drove past did not look strong enough to blow up anything” (page 150)?

Chapter Fourteen

1. What do you think a “Red Crescent nurse” (page 152) is?
2. Where does Mrs. Weera plan to go, and why? Why does Shauzia react with anger at the news?
3. Why do you think Shauzia gives up her plan to go to France and follows Mrs. Weera instead? Were you surprised by her decision? What clues were there early in the chapter that this might happen? What would you do in her place?

A similar situation happens in *Parvana's Journey*; the camp is without food because a convoy of food trucks has been bombed. When a plane drops packages of food, a riot breaks out. See pages 184–85.

For an account that relates to the scene with the acid-scarred woman, see “Karima, 14” (page 29) in *Kids of Kabul*.

For information on the Afghan Red Crescent Society, see [Afghan Red Crescent Society](#)

4. Do you think that Shauzia and Parvana will make it to France someday? What do you think they will be doing in twenty years' time? What kind of women do you think they will be?

To read about Shauzia and Parvana's promise to meet at the Eiffel Tower in twenty years, see page 165 of *The Breadwinner*. The promise is revisited at the end of *My Name Is Parvana* (page 197).

Activity Ideas

Choose from the following ideas to best suit your purposes and class needs.

- Have students create a timeline or plot diagram of the main events in this novel, with brief annotations and small illustrations to describe the events. Have them compare their timelines in small groups. **English Language Arts**
- Discuss Shauzia's prized possession — the picture of the lavender field in France. Ask students to draw or paint a picture that they would similarly keep as a reminder of their own hopes or dreams, something that would sustain them through very difficult times. Have them write an explanation to accompany their artwork. **English Language Arts; Visual Arts**
- Have students skim the chapters and come up with titles for each one. **English Language Arts**
- Have students create a playlist whose titles correspond to each chapter. Have them write a brief description of each selection and why they chose it for that chapter. Have them share their ideas in small groups. **English Language Arts; Music**
- Provide groups of 4–6 students with a very large sheet of paper. Have them divide it into boxes or a circle divided into wedges; there should be one section per group member. At the top of each section, they write a heading (see ideas, below). They sit around the paper, with a section in front of each person, and write an entry in that section, below the heading. When everyone is finished, they rotate the paper, read one another's entries, and write an entry for the new category. Time should be given at each rotation for them to skim the novel for ideas. Ideas for headings are: Saddest Moment, Most Inspiring Moment, Three Adjectives Describing Shauzia, Best Sentence in the Novel, New Word I Learned, What I Want to Learn More About. Afterward, have students compare and share their ideas and reasoning. **English Language Arts**
- Point out to students that the novel has a number of descriptions of sounds, e.g., the sounds of Peshawar (pages 30–31, 34), the sounds of the jail (page 84), the American children's whining (page 101). Discuss how the descriptions add to a reader's understanding of setting and/or action. Have students work on their own or with a partner to skim the novel for other examples and then create a digital soundscape — a series of sound effects — that represents a particular event, chapter or the whole book. They could include spoken-word clips of passages or dialogue from the novel — encourage experimentation. Students can record their own sound effects, and public-domain sound effects are also available on the Internet. **English Language Arts; Drama; ICT**
- Have students create a “split-screen” picture that shows one of the great contrasts based on the book, such as the contrast between what the American children do and what the street children do; the ocean of Shauzia's dreams and the “ocean” in the camp; Shauzia's “bedroom” while living on the street and while staying with the Americans, or students' own bedrooms, if they wish. Students could draw the picture or use clippings to create it. **English Language Arts; Social Studies**

- Remind students that Shauzia hadn't seen her face in a mirror for years. Have students sit in circles, in groups, and take turns calling out things that Shauzia and the street children do not have. Encourage them to identify items that relate to the book, such as the piece of twine she found for Jasper's leash, and to include non-material things such as privacy, a good night's sleep, safety, hugs and smiles. **English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; Social Studies**
- Organize research teams of students to learn about various agencies that supply humanitarian aid to refugee and IDP camps, war-torn areas and street children. The following are just a few examples; brainstorm with students to add to this list.
 - [UNHCR \(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees\) – The UN Refugee Agency](#)
 - [Refugees International](#)
 - [Women for Women International](#)
 - [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)
 - [Aschiana Foundation](#)
 - [Médecins sans Frontières \(Doctors Without Borders\)](#)
 - [Street Kids International](#)
- Have students present their findings, or have them trade a “Find the Facts” website quiz with two or three other groups. **English Language Arts; Social Studies**
- Have students consider the work that people involved in humanitarian aid do. Have them write a personal essay about whether they think they would be suited for this kind of career or volunteer work. **English Language Arts; Health and Life Skills; Social Studies**
- Have students dramatize a scene from the novel that they think is particularly moving, important, informative or memorable. They could give a dramatic reading, perform Readers' Theater, or enact a scene. Their presentations could be live or recorded digitally. Afterward, have the groups explain why they chose that scene. **Drama; English Language Arts**
- Ask students to examine the relationship between Shauzia and Mrs. Weera (or Shauzia and another character in *Mud City*). How do they connect and respond to each other? What do they think of each other? Does the relationship change? Have them express their ideas in an essay, graphic representation, exchange of letters, monologues, interviews or dramatic scene. **Drama; English**