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L&L Identity Book Report

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A Book Report Comparison

of The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis and Old Yeller by Fred Gipson

Who would have thought a book about a young girl in war - torn Kabul, Afghanistan in the 21st century could be similar to a book about a young boy living in the 1860's on the wild Texas frontier? The Breadwinner and Old Yeller are those two books. The similarities between the two stories are not only striking but both of these stories are inspiring. The stories tell of two young people living in different times and in different parts of the world going through hard times and finding the grit and perseverance to survive.

The two books tell the stories of kids my age who are forced to take an unexpected leadership role in their families. In The Breadwinner, Parvana, takes that role when her father is taken by the Taliban and put in prison. In Old Yeller, Travis' father left home to work on a cattle drive to Kansas. The books describe the hard times the kids and their families experienced.

Even though these stories took place in different periods in history, the stories share many similarities. In each book the fathers were removed from the family, forcing the main characters, both children, to step up and act as the breadwinner for each family. Both were told to do so by their father as he was leaving the family. In Old Yeller, Travis, the main character was told, "while I'm gone, you'll be the man of the family. I want you to act like one. You take care of Mama and Little Arliss." (Old Yeller pg.4). In the Breadwinner, Parvana was told, "Take care of the others, my Malali." (pg.35). While neither of these children should have been put in the position of having to take care of their family, both did so willingly, knowing how important their contribution is to their family, they will do whatever it takes.

Parvana is an 11 year old girl living in Kabul, Afghanistan. Initially she was raised in a beautiful home where they had servants. Both of her parents were well educated and she attended school until the Taliban forced it to close. Before her father was put in prison, Parvana helped him to and from the market each day. Growing up in a frontier town in Texas, Travis, as the oldest son, helped his father with all of the tasks required around his house. Both of these characters did what they did because that is what is expected of children of that age at that time.

In *Old Yeller*, the U.S. Army made the frontier where Travis lived safe by moving Native Americans to reservations. Other than that, frontier families were on their own, having to rely upon neighbors like Bud Searcy for help. In *The Breadwinner*, the Taliban did nothing to help the people get by. For survival, the main characters had to rely on their own family and friends such as Mrs. Weera and Shauzia for help. In both books, each family suffered the loss of a son. In *Old Yeller*, Travis' brother died from pneumonia. In *The Breadwinner* Parvana's brother Hossaim was killed by a land mine.

Both Parvana and Travis share similar identity traits. Both are kind, strong, caring for their family and determined. Both had siblings who they argued with throughout each book, but when it appeared as though they were going to lose their sibling, they realized how much they loved and cared for each other. Parvana and Nooria were constantly arguing with each other in the same way that Travis and his brother Arliss. It seemed as though Nooria belittled Parvana and how she did her work. After working with her father all day, Parvana wanted to rest before going to get water. Nooria said "If you fetched it yesterday, when mother asked you to, you wouldn't have so much to haul today." (pg.25). When Travis and Arliss fought, it was more physical. After Travis hit Old Yeller with a rock, Arliss responded the same way, and "a rock nearly tore my left ear off. I whirled around just in time to duck another that would have caught me square in the left eye." (Pg.32) Parvana's love for her sister (Nooria), showed shortly after that Nooria would be leaving Kabul for Mazar-e-Sharif to get married. Parvana "wanted to

buy Nooria a present, too. She wandered through the market looking for things for sale. She finally decided on a pen in a beaded case.” (pg.123). In Travis’ case, when he saw Arliss “So helpless against the angry bear, I learned different. I knew then that I loved him as much as I did Mama and Papa, maybe in some ways even a little bit more.” (pg.61-62).

One big difference between the books is the setting. *The Breadwinner* is set in the Afghan capital of Kabul, a large city where people live in apartments. Parvana had daily interaction with people who were not members of her family. On the other hand Travis’ interaction outside of the family was limited to contact with Bud Searcy and his granddaughter Lisbeth.

Another difference between these two characters was that, in order to provide for her family, Parvana had to cut her hair to look and act like a boy changing her name to Kaseem. This was due to the Taliban banning females from going out in public without a male present. Travis had no need to conceal his identity as a boy in this manner.

Reading these two stories was interesting and enjoyable for me. I never thought that I would like either of these books as much as I did. And I never thought that two stories set in such different times and places would be so similar. Most importantly, though, the characters in the books inspire me by their strong identities. Parvana and Travis who are both about my age, are characters who have grit, determination, strength, a strong work ethic and love for their families. Discovering their identities through the books, makes me want to follow in their footsteps.