

ONE MORE MOUNTAIN

By Deborah Ellis

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 11–14 Years
Middle Fiction: UPPER PRIMARY/LOWER
SECONDARY

GENRE: Realistic war fiction

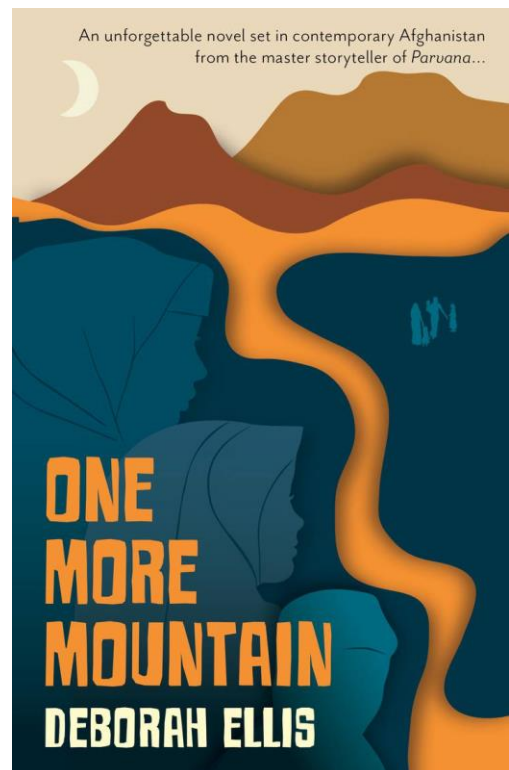
THEMES: Afghanistan, Taliban, Ethics of Allied Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan, Activism and Terrorism, Torture and Violence, Moral Choices, Education and Feminism, War, Loss and Refugees, Hope.

ISBN: 978 1 76106 813 3

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CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS

- **ENGLISH:** Literature, literacy and language
- **HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**
- **VISUAL ARTS**



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INTRODUCTION

'He cried for himself.

And he cried for Afghanistan, which kept getting kicked in the stomach, every time it tried to get back on its feet.' (p 102)

From the master storyteller of the bestselling Parvana books comes a timely new novel set in contemporary Afghanistan, featuring Parvana and Shauzia continuing their mission to protect women and girls from their dire reality under the rules re-imposed by the Taliban.

PLOT

'It was noise and it was blood and it was bodies. It was dust and chunks of concrete and a roar from the devil.' (p 99)

This is a compelling new novel, inspired by real events in Afghanistan in 2021 and featuring the much-loved female heroes of the Parvana books.

In Kabul, 15-year-old Damsa runs away to avoid being forced into marriage by her family. She is helped by Shauzia who takes her to her friend Parvana's Green Valley school. It has been twenty years since Parvana and Shauzia had to disguise themselves as boys to support their families. And when the Taliban were defeated in 2001, they began to rebuild their lives. But everything changed in 2021 when the Taliban rose to power again and the restrictions they imposed had a devastating impact on women and girls and their hard-won freedoms. With little warning, Kabul airport is shut down and danger is everywhere. And when the Taliban come to Green Valley, Parvana sends her son Rafi and sister Maryam to New York, and later Shauzia, Damsa and the other members of her little community are also sent away in search of safety, and must endure more devastation as Afghanistan is once again under siege. A hauntingly compelling story of courage, heartbreak and resilience.

BEFORE READING

- What did the cover suggest to you about the story?
- What did you know about Afghanistan before reading this novel?
- Had you read any of the author's other books?
- Read one of the previous Parvana books to give some extra context for this novel.

Q&A WITH DEBORAH ELLIS

How did you become a writer?

I grew up in small town Ontario and, like many kids, always felt like an outsider. Reading and writing kept me company. I also grew up in a world that was poised on the edge of atomic war. Getting involved in the anti-war movement and then the feminist movement helped me feel like part of something important and hopeful. I'd been writing since I was a child – very badly! – and wrote many books that got quickly rejected until finally publishing *Looking For X* when I was thirty-nine. Around that time, the Taliban took over Kabul for the first time, and when the news of the crimes against women that was happening there hit the Toronto papers, I knew I had to get involved. One of the things I thought I could do was to go to the refugee camps in Pakistan and meet with those who had fled Afghanistan. I did that, and heard the stories that became the basis for the first book about Parvana, an eleven-year-old girl forced to pretend to be a boy in order to support her family in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. This led to being able to travel to many other places to learn from many other people, and to share their experiences with young readers around the world. In August of 2021,

the Taliban re-took power in Afghanistan, and that prompted me to write *One More Mountain*, in hopes of raising money to assist organisations to get food and other necessities to the Afghan people. It is disheartening that we don't always get wiser and kinder as we get older, not as individuals and not as a planet, but we need to remember that war is a choice. We can always learn to make better choices.

What do you see as the major themes /essence of this book?

Empowerment, women's rights, learning to direct your own life and find joy in the service to others.

Can you tell us about your inspiration/how you came to write this book?

The main characters – Parvana and Shauzia – have been down many difficult roads together. Their friendship has grown through working together to confront hardship and injustice. I really like these women and I think they show how we can be afraid and still powerful, how we can grieve and still fight on, how we can laugh and still stand strong against injustice.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

ENGLISH

LANGUAGE



Expository text

- *Activity:* Research key events in Afghanistan since 1999 (the Taliban, US invasion and occupation, US withdrawal in 2021 and return of the Taliban) and write your own short summary of the period.

Writing

- *Activity:* Write a poem as if written by Rafi after he has given his ticket to Samar and set off on his journey home.

Description

- *Activity:* Write your own description of Green Valley school based on how it is described in this novel.

LITERATURE

Narrative Perspective

The novel is told in third person, but each chapter is told from the personal subjective view of various characters. Damsa is the focus in early chapters, Rafi in later ones, and the novel ends with Parvana.

- *Question:* How does this shifting perspective help to enhance the storytelling?

Literary Devices

Authors often use literary devices such as metaphors, similes and allegories to enhance their story or provide more layers of meaning.

- *Activity:* Locate any such devices employed in this novel.

Comparative Literature

Comparing different works of literature helps readers gain various perspective on the same matter.

- *Activity:* Compare this text to picture books and other works of fiction dealing with similar issues and cultures.

LITERACY

Characters

- *Activity:* Refer to the following list of characters and choose one to conduct a character study on, using quotes to illustrate your analysis: Damsa; Shauzia; Larmina; Rafi; Parvana; Maryam Gulalai; Asif; Hadiyah; Zahra; 'three sisters – the wolf pack' (p 26) who are 'oldest to youngest, Alia, age ten, Noosala, nine, and Rosta, who's eight,' (p 39); Old Mrs Musharef; Gulum, the Talib; the man who is a

Literature in Context

Year 7: Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts

Creating Literature

Year 8: Create literary texts that draw upon text structures and language features of other texts for particular purposes and effects

Creating Texts

Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience

Examining Literature

Year 5: Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses

Responding to Literature

Year 6: Identify and explain how choices in language, for example modality, emphasis, repetition and metaphor, influence personal response to different texts

Interpreting, Analysing and Evaluating

Year 8: Explore and explain the ways authors combine different modes and media in creating texts, and the impact of these choices on the viewer/listener

Responding to Literature

Year 7: Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view

friend of Mrs Weera; Samar; the angry woman on the rock; the kind balloon seller and his family; a man stacking furniture on his truck; Homa; Laith; Yousef.

Question: Which of these characters did you find most appealing and why?

Responding to Literature

Year 8: Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts

- *Activity:* Study this quote: 'It was an old argument between his parents – Parvana insisting that Maryam needed her help, always had and always would, and Asif saying Parvana needed to help Maryam more than Maryam needed help from Parvana. And that as soon as Parvana realized that, Maryam would start to stand on her own two feet. Rafi thought they were both right. Maryam could look after herself, but he doubted that she ever would. It wasn't just that Maryam was selfish. It was that she truly believed that what she wanted to do at any particular moment was more important than what anyone else wanted her to do. 'Other people will eat away your life,' she had told Rafi on more than one occasion. 'I want to sing, so that has to be first. If I paid attention to your mother, she'd have me sweeping floors and bathing rescued babies all day. Claim your time! Your art is important!'" (p 17) *Question:* Is Maryam right about this?

Literature and Content

Year 7: Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts

- *Activity:* Contrast between characters is represented by these two quotes about Maryam and Parvana: "It's my own fault," said Parvana. 'I didn't want her to have to be as serious as me, but she needed to be a little bit serious. Every time I tried to push her in that direction, she went all-in on irresponsibility.' 'You liked that she was irresponsible,' Shauzia said mildly. Clearly, the two of them had had this discussion before. 'You said over and over that it was about time a woman in Afghanistan could finally act like there would always be enough for her – enough food, enough freedom and enough space.' (p 43–4)

and "Rafi," said Homa, 'when your mother was a child she decided who she wanted to be and she never wavered from that.' (p 211)

Question: What makes Maryam so different from her sister Parvana?

Critical Literacy

Responding to Literature

Year 6: Identify and explain how choices in language, for example modality, emphasis, repetition and metaphor, influence personal response to different texts

- *Activity:* Consider the scene describing Asif's death (p 102). It is a shock, as it happens in such an ordinary, almost prosaic way. *Question:* How did this scene affect you and your understanding of the situation in Afghanistan? What did you learn from reading this scene?

Theme

- *Activity:* Read this quote: 'I have no career. I have nothing. All those years of struggle and hope. Hope? Hope is a poison. Here.' She thrust a teacup at Shauzia. 'Go fill this with poison. I'll drink it. It would taste better than hope.' (p 112) *Question:* Parvana has always been a beacon of hope for those she has helped. Why does she lose her hope at this point?

ASSESSMENT

- Build a diorama Green Valley School.
- Write a synopsis for a sequel to the novel set two years later when Rafi, Damsa and the other children are older.
- Write a review of the novel examining the writing style and the narrative voice in which it is written.
- Read this quote: 'You remember,' said Gulam, the Talib. 'The poetry I learned here is just as you said, an umbrella in the rain, a blanket in the snow, sunshine on a dark day, and a companion in

my despair. Thank you.’ (p 56) Write about the power of poetry and, using examples, discuss how it can reflect aspects of our own lives.

- What do you imagine might become of Rafi? Will he become a famous ballet dancer? Or will he become an activist like his mother? Base your answer on what you have read about his character in the novel.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Afghanistan

‘In Afghanistan, many boys his age worked all day, crushing rocks or hauling water up hills or selling things in the street or begging. He had met these boys when he went out with his mother as they took food around to homes that had none. Those boys were just like him, except that they knew hunger better than they knew how to read. Maryam might think she was special. Rafi knew that he was not special. Just lucky.’ (pp 20–1)

‘Before the light disappears, I would like to invite you all to see what I have been drawing,’ he said. The women from the reading group were already over there, standing in a semicircle and looking at the floor, pointing down and talking quietly. Damsa and her group joined them. ‘I am calling it The Garden of Afghanistan,’ the artist said. It was a garden that he had drawn. On rough cement with only charcoal, he had created a vision of their country as they all knew it could be, even though many of them were not yet old enough to know that they knew. There were orchards and snow leopards, playgrounds and schools, women and men and children learning and building together. ‘I’d like to live there,’ said Noosala. ‘We will,’ said Shauzia, as strong and sure and steady as the mountains.” (p 222)

- *Question:* What do these quotes reveal about Afghanistan?

Taliban

‘We’d have to tell lies at all the checkpoints. We have false ID for everyone, but Parvana says the Taliban are better educated this time than they were the first time they took over. They can read. They can use technology. Any man driving us would be in danger, which means we would be in danger.’ (p 138)

- *Activity:* Discuss what you have learned about the Taliban in reading this novel.
- *Question:* Ellis depicts members of the Taliban in the novel in a somewhat nuanced way. While they are portrayed as dangerous and cruel, how and why does she hint at their humanity?

Ethics of Allied Forces’ Withdrawal from Afghanistan

‘The Taliban have taken Kabul. They’ve got the whole country now. They’re back.’ (p 46)

The terrible chaos of the exodus from Kabul in 2021 is described graphically in this novel. Rafi, Asif and Maryam are just three in a huge crowd of people trying to escape. The book’s strength lies in the fact that it gives a first-hand Afghan view of the sudden and violent withdrawal of US and allied forces in August 2021.

- *Activity:* Discuss the ethics around the west’s decision to withdraw, as well as Australia’s responsibilities to people left behind after our occupation.
- *Questions:* Why did we go to Afghanistan in the first place and what was achieved by our presence there? Parvana’s Green Valley work is an excellent example of a

HASS: Geography

Year 6: Differences in the economic, demographic and social characteristics of countries across the world

HASS: Geography

Year 6: Australia’s connections with other countries and how these change people and places

good outcome but were there bad ones, too. Should Australia give refugee status to more Afghans? Should Australia provide money and aid to the Taliban so that they can distribute it to people suffering malnutrition and lack of health services?

Activism and Terrorism

'The people in the safe house had worked with Parvana and Shauzia for a long time. They told stories of Rafi's mother rescuing girls from forced marriages and women from abusive ones, of getting food to families and getting families to doctors, of standing up to corrupt officials and making daring escapes in the night. Mrs Weera had been a Member of Parliament.' (pp 22–3)

'Of course it bothered her. She hated her limitations. For every girl she saved, there were hundreds more forced into marriages they didn't want. For every child Parvana taught to read, there were a thousand who would never hold a book. For every person she fed, there were so many others who would die empty in the cold and the dark. That was life these days in Afghanistan. That was life in many countries, even in this modern world that had glorious technology, unlimited access to knowledge and many kind people who wanted to do good. Some people were still considered expendable. That's the way it was. That's just what she had to fight against.' (p 224)

HASS: Civics and Citizenship

Year 5: How people with shared beliefs and values work together to achieve a civic goal

- *Question:* What can activists like Parvana achieve? What challenges do they face?

Torture and Violence

'Larmina moved her scarf to reveal old burn scars, the skin wrinkled and discoloured. 'My older brother threw hot oil on me when I refused to marry the man my father picked out for me. He tried to get my face, but I turned away in time. Parvana says my scar is my badge of honour and I should wear it proudly. Sometimes I can do that. More than I used to, anyway.' (p 26)

HASS: Civics and Citizenship

Year 7: How values, including freedom, respect, inclusion, civility, responsibility, compassion, equality and a 'fair go', can promote cohesion within Australian society

- *Question:* This is a terrible example of some of the violence which has taken place in this conflict. How should such violence be challenged in a non-violent way?

Moral Choices

"The point is that you helped me become the sort of man who would bring these girls to you instead of selling them to the highest bidder. Teacher,' he said with respect, 'I cannot guarantee that more Taliban won't come to your door. I follow orders. I don't make them. But I can promise that when I walk away tonight, whether you take the children or not, I will forget this place exists.'" (p 58)

- *Question:* What did you learn from this encounter?

Education and Feminism

'Women will not be silent! Women will not be silent!' (p 204)

One of the chief complaints of women under Taliban rule is loss of freedom and access to education and work.

- *Activity:* Research the plight of women under Taliban rule.

War, Loss and Refugees

War in countries like Afghanistan has led to one of the greatest refugee crises the world has ever known. Displaced people are forced to live in camps and to take dangerous often fatal journeys to seek freedom elsewhere.

- *Activity:* Research the global refugee crisis.

- *Question:* How can countries assist refugees in this crisis?

Hope

‘Out of something bad, we will make something good.’ ... Maybe that can work for me, too, Damsa thought.’

- *Activity:* Discuss this statement.

ASSESSMENT

- Read this quote: ‘So the lesson, dear Damsa, is that where we think we are going when we start out our journey is often not where we end up.’ (p 50) Write a response to this statement drawing on the events which take place in this novel.
- ‘The retaking of Afghanistan by the Taliban has reminded us that progress does not always move in a straight line. It would be lovely if humanity only got wiser as it got older, but it doesn’t always work that way, just as we individuals don’t always get wiser with age. Too often we fall back on old patterns, old fears, because they are easier than being brave and reaching out to something new.’ (Author’s Note, p 237) *Activity:* Invite students to write an essay about the historical developments in Afghanistan which support this statement.
- Choose one of the moral dilemmas canvassed in this novel and write an argument for and against a certain course of action.

VISUAL ARTS

Comparative Art Styles

- Explore ideas and practices used by artists, to represent different views, beliefs and opinions. *Activity:* Study Afghan art and techniques. See ‘[Afghan Art](#)’ (*Wikipedia*) and ‘[Afghanistan: The arts and cultural Institutions](#)’ (*Brittanica*).
- Develop and apply techniques and processes when making their artworks. *Activity:* Invite students to create an artwork referencing Afghan art and display the students’ work.
- Explain how visual arts conventions communicate meaning by comparing artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts. *Activity:* Research both traditional and contemporary Afghan art.



Visual Arts

Years 5 & 6: Plan the display of artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience

Years 5 & 6: Explain how visualarts conventions communicate meaning by comparing artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks

ASSESSMENT

- Paint a picture of the Afghanistan landscape based on what you have learned from reading this book.
- Create a new cover for this book, based on your interpretation of it.
- Invite students to identify art by Afghan artists (contemporary and traditional) and write an analysis of the common tropes used in their art.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Ellis has achieved international acclaim with her courageous and dramatic books that give Western readers a glimpse into the plight of children in developing countries. She has authored some thirty books for young readers dealing mainly with the way children are impacted by war in its many forms. Her novels have explored children under the Taliban in Afghanistan, affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Africa, poverty in North America, coping with having a parent in prison, working through despair and generational suicide, and living in refugee camps. Her non-fiction books of interviews showcase the voices of children trying to make sense of the violence of the grown-up world. Her books are published in many countries and in many languages, and provide financial support to organizations working to make the world better.

She has won the Governor General's Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the University of California's Middle East Book Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award. A long-time feminist and anti-war activist, she is best known for the Parvana series, which has been published around the world in twenty-nine languages, with more than two million dollars in royalties donated to organisations such as Women for Women in Afghanistan, Mental Health Without Borders, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the Leprosy Mission, Children in Crisis fund of IBBY and the UNHCR. In 2017 Parvana was adapted into an award-winning animated film called *The Breadwinner*. Deborah will be donating 100% of her royalties from *One More Mountain* to Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, an organisation working on the ground to provide urgent food supplies and emergency aid to those in need across Afghanistan. In 2006, Deb was named to the Order of Ontario and in 2016 she was named to the Order of Canada. She lives in Simcoe, Ontario, Canada.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THESE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

Picture Books:

A Sky-Blue Bench by Bahram Rahman, ill. by Peggy Collins.

Ali's Story: A real-life account of his journey from Afghanistan by Andy Glynn, ill. by Salvador Maldonado.

Brave with Beauty: A Story of Afghanistan by Maxine Rose Schur ill. by Patricia Dewitt-Grush and Robin Dewitt.

I See the Sun in Afghanistan by Dedie King ill. by Judith Inglese.

Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story of Afghanistan by Jeanette Winter.

Razia's Ray of Hope: One Girl's Dream of an Education by Elizabeth Suneby, ill. by Suana Verelst.

Sonam and the Silence by Eddie Ayres, ill. by Ronak Taher.

Tales Told in Tents: Stories from Central Asia by Sally Pomme Clayton, ill. by Sophie Herxheimer.

The Afghanistan Pup by Mark Wilson.

The Library Bus by Bahram Rahman, ill. by Gabrielle Grimard.

The Sky of Afghanistan by Ana A. De Eulate, ill. by Sonja Wimmer.

Waiting for the Owl's Call by Gloria Whelan, ill. by Pascal Milelli.

Fiction:

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini.

And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini.

Naveed: Through My Eyes by John Heffernan.

Parvana by Deborah Ellis.

Parvana: A Graphic Novel (based on the original novel by Deborah Ellis, adapted by Nora Twomey)

Parvana's Journey by Deborah Ellis

Parvana's Promise by Deborah Ellis

Prince of Afghanistan by Louis Nowra.

Shadow by Michael Morpurgo

Shauzia by Deborah Ellis

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini.

When Michael Meets Mina by Randa Abdel-Fattah.

Words in the Dust by Trent Reedy.

Non-fiction:

Afghanistan by David Downing.

Afghanistan Enchantment of the World by Ruth Bjorkland.

Afghanistan: Countries Around the World by Jovanka Joann Milivojevic.

Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War by Deborah Ellis.

Timelines: The War in Afghanistan by Brian Williams.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

'Afghan Art', *Wikipedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_art

'Afghan Refugee Crisis Explained', *UNHCR*: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/>

'Afghan Refugees', *Wikipedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_refugees

'Afghan Women brave 'brutal' Taliban response to protest "genocide" attack on ethnic Hazars' by Ahmad Muktar, *CBS News*: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-women-protest-hazara-genocide-suicide-bombing-kabul/>

'Afghanistan Helpsheet', *Refugee Council of Australia*: <https://www.asyluminsight.com/refugees-from-afghanistan>

- 'Afghanistan Humanities Crisis', *UNHCR*:
<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/afghanistan>
- 'Afghanistan: The arts and cultural institutions', *Britannica*:
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan/The-arts-and-cultural-institutions>
- 'Afghanistan', *Britannica*: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan/>
- 'Afghanistan', *World Countries for Kids*: <https://www.worldcountriesforkids.com/afghanistan/>
- 'Afghanistan's refugees: 40 years of dispossession', *Amnesty International*:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/afghanistan-refugees-forty-years/>
- 'Asylum Applications and Refugees from Afghanistan', *World Data*:
<https://www.worlddata.info/asia/afghanistan/asylum.php>
- 'Australia to take in 16,500 more refugees from Afghanistan at cost of \$666 million', by Steven Dziedzic and Annika Burgess, *ABC News*: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-30/budget-afghanistan-refugee-intake-humanitarian-program/100948614>
- 'Australia's Response to Refugees from Afghanistan', *Asylum Insight*:
<https://www.asyluminsight.com/refugees-from-afghanistan>
- 'Child Protection: Protecting Afghanistan's most vulnerable children', *UNICEF*:
<https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/child-protection>
- 'Increase in Refugees from Afghanistan', *The Borgen Project*:
<https://www.asyluminsight.com/refugees-from-afghanistan>
- 'Over a Million Flee as Afghanistan's Economy Collapses', by Christine Goldbaum and Yaqoob Akbary, *New York Times*:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/world/asia/afghanistan-migration-refugees.html>
- 'Since the Taliban takeover, Afghans hoping to leave Afghanistan have few ways out', by D. Parvaz, *NPR*: <https://www.npr.org/2022/10/03/1121053865/afghanistan-refugees-visas>
- 'Stories of Afghanistan Refugees', *Save the Children*:
<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/refugee-children-crisis/afghanistan-refugee-stories>
- 'Taliban', *Britannica*: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Taliban>