

Mulan did it. Arya Stark did it. Joan of Arc did it. Girls and women throughout history and fiction have dressed in traditional boys' clothes for a variety of reasons, such as comfort and safety. In this month's book, *The Breadwinner*, Parvana dresses like a boy in order to help feed her family. Although she's always terrified that the truth will be discovered and she'll be brutally punished, she can't help but enjoy the freedom and self-reliance she gets when she walks through the world with a male identity.

What about in our contemporary American culture? Sure, maybe there's no need to dress up as a boy in order to get a job, but do girls and women wear more subtle disguises? As I read this month's title, I became very curious about the ways in which women - even now - might feel the need to conceal their femininity. For example, might women and girls feel the need to downplay their female-ness while out at night or traveling alone, for fear of unwanted attention or even assault? Or, might women decide to behave in a more "masculine" way in order to be taken seriously in the workplace?

I hope you enjoy this month's book and that your club's conversation takes you in many interesting directions. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook page! [bit.ly/GLbookFB](https://bit.ly/GLbookFB)

### **Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes**

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up.

## Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

This month's book is about a girl who dons a boy's clothing (and identity) in order to contribute to her family. But, when Parvana first cuts her hair and puts on her brother's clothes, she finds that she really likes the way she *feels*. She likes the short, uncomplicated hair and the pockets in her clothing.

Imagine yourself wearing something that is undoubtedly *you* and that makes you feel comfortable and good about yourself. What are you wearing? What kind of clothing feels best to you? (Maybe there are different answers for this, or maybe the answer is that clothing doesn't affect how you feel at all.)

Pair up and discuss, or share as a whole group. Alternatively, everyone could get a blank piece of paper and take five minutes to sketch their ideal clothing.

## Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

You might decide to start the discussion with every member saying her favorite part of the book before reading discussion questions. Some groups might have time to get to all of these questions, but many groups will pick one or two questions and spend the whole meeting discussing those. Feel free to come up with your own discussion questions, or bring up any ideas that came up while you were reading.

- On page 9, the author writes that Parvana was “one of the lucky ones” because she could read and write. What does it mean that she considered herself lucky for something that we take for granted? What are other differences between your life and Parvana's? What are some similarities?
- What is the significance of the story Parvana's father tells about the warrior Malali?
- How does the father's arrest affect everyone in the family? Does it change the way they behave? Does it change their relationships?

- What is it like for Parvana the first time she dresses as a boy? What about the first time she goes out as a boy?
- Why is it so easy for her to fool everyone?
- How does Parvana begin to change the longer she pretends to be a boy?
- Why do you think the author included the scene in which the Taliban soldier asks Parvana to read the letter to his wife?
- Is Parvana's friend Shauzia right to want to leave her family and escape Afghanistan?
- How has Parvana changed by the end of the story? What do you think caused the change?

### Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

In this month's book, Parvana disguises herself as a boy in order to work and earn money for her family. Hopefully you will not have to go "under cover" in order to achieve what you want. But, we tend to make more progress when we have clearly defined goals. What is the life that you envision for yourself? Can you talk about it in as much detail as possible? Try focusing on what's really exciting and amazing about your plans and goals. Next time you're feeling frustrated, go back to that plan and see if you can focus on making some part of it happen.

If your group is feeling crafty, you might do this as a drawing exercise or even a collage activity with pictures cut from old catalogues and magazines.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share around the circle so everyone has a turn, or give time so anyone who wants to share can do so. If you've made art, you can place it around the room, gallery-style, and let everyone walk around the room checking out the different pieces.

## Closing, 5 minutes

Make sure you've chosen a date for your April meeting (the last one of the year!) before parting ways.

## Further Reading

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more books like it, here are some suggestions. If there are other books you would like to recommend, we'd love to hear them! Please share them on our **Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook Group** [bit.ly/GLbookFB](https://bit.ly/GLbookFB) so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

The *Breadwinner* series by Deborah Ellis - Ms Ellis continues Parvana's journey in *Parvana's Journey*, *Mud City*, and *My Name is Parvana*.

*The Girl Who Could Fly* by Victoria Forester - Piper McCloud's amazing flying ability gains her admission to a top-secret school for kids with special skills like hers. Once she's there she discovers a plot to use the kids for evil purposes.

*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi - Charlotte is from a very proper family, not at all the kind of young lady who would find herself traveling *alone* from England to Rhode Island with a band of rough sailors and a suspicious captain. And, yet... that's exactly where she is. The intrigue and adventure never stop in the pages of Charlotte's entertaining journal.