



SOUTH ASIA BOOK AWARD  
for Children's and Young Adult Literature  
Lesson plan for  
*Kids of Kabul* by Deborah Ellis

# Kids of Kabul: What is it like to grow up in Afghanistan? by Rachel M. Heilman

English and Social Studies

Grades 7-12

- CCSS ELA Reading:  
Literature Standards 7 and 9
- CCSS ELA Writing  
Standard 1
- C3 Framework Dimensions  
1-4 (D2.His.16 and D4.6)

## Overview

This lesson is appropriate for use in a middle or high school classroom. The level of reading is simple, but the ideas are complex. The lesson is aligned with Common Core ELA Reading Literature Standards 7 (researching to build and present knowledge) and 9 (draw evidence from texts), Common Core ELA Writing Standard 1 (developing and supporting a claim) and the National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework's Dimension 4 pathway (taking informed action). The lesson could be used as part of a focus on non-fiction in an English classroom, to encourage discussion of modern-day Afghanistan in a history or current events class, or in any context where challenges in children's lives, the impact of war, or activism are relevant.

*Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War* by Deborah Ellis shares the stories of children living in Afghanistan based on interviews done by the author in 2011. The text can be used in its entirety or individual chapters (each representing a story) may be assigned. This lesson will require students to focus on a particular aspect of development or daily life in Afghanistan. They will extend their reading of a particular case (chapter) into their own research in order to reach a broader understanding of a particular aspect of Afghani life.

## Objectives

- Students will consider recent Afghani history through construction of a timeline.
- Students will gain an understanding of life in modern Afghanistan.
- Students will seek to answer the question "What is it like to grow up in Afghanistan?"
- Students will conduct a short research project to answer a self-generated question about life in Afghanistan.
- Students will have the opportunity to contribute to efforts to improve conditions for Afghani children.

## Bell-Ringer: One Word Activity

When class begins, ask students to individually consider what is necessary to have a "good childhood". They should narrow their opinion down to one word that encapsulates what they believe is the single most important thing for children to have or experience. Once they have one word in mind, put them in pairs. Each pair should discuss their words and choose one as the best answer. The pairs should then be attached to another pair to battle out which group's word is most important for children. Once these groups of four have finished, collect the winning words (for example, writing them on a white board). Discuss how similar or how varied the responses are. Can they be put into categories? Are they universal necessities or specific to one culture? Whose

## Materials

- *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War* by Deborah Ellis (Groundwood Books, House of Anansi Press, 2012)
- Asia Society's *Homeland Afghanistan*: <http://afghanistan.asiasociety.org/>
- KWL Chart: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/chart-a-30226.html>
- Deborah Ellis' "Get Involved" Page: <http://deborahellis.com/get-involved/>

## Other Resources

- NPR Interview with the Author: [www.npr.org/2012/08/20/159351584/what-the-future-holds-for-the-kids-of-kabul](http://www.npr.org/2012/08/20/159351584/what-the-future-holds-for-the-kids-of-kabul)
- School Library Journal's CCSS Curriculum for *Kids of Kabul*: [http://www.slj.com/2012/08/standards/ccaugust2012\\_afghanistan/](http://www.slj.com/2012/08/standards/ccaugust2012_afghanistan/)

responsibility is it to ensure that children have those things?

## Orientation: An Introduction to Recent Afghani History

In order to contextualize the stories they will be reading, students will need a basic understanding of recent Afghani history.

1. Help students locate Afghanistan on a map (two are included in the opening pages of the text).
2. Have students, working individually or in groups, put the following events in order on a timeline: U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, civil war, Communist regime, Taliban regime

**Correct Order:** Communist regime (1978), Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-89), civil war (1989-1996), Taliban regime (1996-2001), U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (2001)

3. Read aloud the “About Afghanistan” summary from the end of *Kids of Kabul*.
4. Show students the “Afghanistan in the World” (1:59) and “Afghanistan Today” (2:30) clips from the Asia Society’s *Homeland Afghanistan* web site: <http://afghanistan.asiasociety.org/>

## Jigsaw Step 1: Reading

1. Students should select or be assigned one of the following topics (aligned to a chapter) to focus on. If time allows, students should read the entire book. Alternately, only one of the chapters can be assigned. The chapters are not numbered, rather they are labeled with the child’s name and age. The page number provided matches the Greenwood Books 2014 hardback edition.

### **Education**

- Faranoz, 14 (p. 14)
- Shabona, 14 (p. 56)
- Angela, 17 (p. 89)
- Miriam, 14 (p. 120)
- Sigrullah, 14 (p. 129)

### **Art**

- Liza, 16 (p.20)
- Parwais, 17 (p.76)

### **Child Labor**

- Aman, 16 (p. 25)

### **Empowerment of Women and Girls**

- Karima, 14 (p. 29)
- Zuhal, 13 (p. 71)
- Sukina, 15 (p. 101)

Sara, 17 (p.112)

**Sports**

Amullah, 15 (p. 52)

Palwasha, 16 (p. 81)

**Medical Treatment**

Shyah, 14 (p. 67)

Noorahu, 16 (p.85)

**Prison**

Nilab, 15 (p. 95)

Anonymous girl, 14 (p. 124)

2. Before reading, students should complete the K (what I know) and W (what I want to know) portions of a KWL chart (example provided in the resources section). Their responses will be based on the assigned topics. For example, “What I know about education in Afghanistan” or “What I want to know about sports in Afghanistan”.
3. After reading the assigned text, students should complete the L (what I learned) portion of the chart. Each child’s story is preceded by a brief introduction to the relevant issues, so there is a lot of information to be learned even from the few pages of each chapter.

## Jigsaw Step 2 (Optional): Research

After considering which of their questions from the “Want to Know” column didn’t get answered and likely having developed new questions after reading, students should develop a research question. Either as homework or during class, students should investigate the answer to their questions. They should record their sources on the back of their KWL charts and add new information to the L (what I learned) column. If time or research resources are limited, this step can be skipped and the rest of the lesson will involve only the information provided in the readings.

## Jigsaw Step 3: Developing and Supporting a Thesis Statement

Now that students are more familiar with Afghanistan and a particular topic within Afghani culture, they should develop a thesis statement based on their reading and research (using their KWL charts as a guide). For example, a thesis statement might be “Afghani women need more economic freedom in order to ensure they are able to exercise their equal rights” or “Literacy should be the main focus of education in Afghanistan” or “Wisdom is the result of experience, not schooling”. Students should then list three pieces of evidence from their reading and research. They should include the source of each piece of evidence.

## Jigsaw Step 4: Sharing Knowledge

Students should be given an opportunity to share what they've learned and the thesis statements they've developed. This can be done using class presentations or simply within groups (using the pairs or groups of four from the bell-ringer would be effective).

## Extension: Activism

This lesson should inspire students to help children like those they've learned about. If students would like to work towards financial support, there are many organizations that would appreciate financial donations. Some of these can be found at the author's web page: <http://deborahellis.com/get-involved/>. Students might also consider writing letters to political figures who have some control over how the United States allocates foreign aid dollars. Or you can challenge them to devise their own plan for making a difference.