

I so enjoyed reading *Diego, Run!* last year and have been hanging out for the sequel. It did not disappoint me. Deborah Ellis's books allow you to travel overseas and experience another culture without incurring the costs and leaving the comforts of home.

Diego's Pride picks up with Diego having suffered a terrifying escape from the cruelty of his captors in the coca pits and he has now found himself at the Ricardos' farm. They grow coca as a cash crop for tea and chewing but not for the manufacture of cocaine. Nevertheless the coca crop of the whole village is confiscated by government soldiers who are paid by the USA in an attempt to curb the flow of cocaine into the US.

The villagers protest by blockading the roads which result in the virtual shut-down of the Bolivian economy.

Diego is caught up in the conflict and has to decide between staying to help the villagers who have shown kindness to him, and grabbing the opportunity to go back to his family.

Researched thoroughly and well-written, this book offers upper primary children an exciting fast-paced story and a glimpse into the lives of children their own age but living in a different culture.

Nova Gibson, Summerland Primary School, New Zealand

What another thrilling chapter in Diego's life! After reading his first adventure, *Diego, run!* I couldn't wait to read the sequel.

In this book, Diego escapes the coca pits and is found by a family who takes him in and nourishes him back to health. The Ricardo's live simply growing enough food and livestock for their family, Bonita, Martino and Santo. They also grew a crop of coca trees for harvest to earn money for food and other essential items.

But the soldiers come and rip out the precious crop and destroy each farmer's livelihood. So a plan was hatched to blockade the bridge to stop all traffic into and out of the village. They stood, man to man, woman to woman, child to child, in solidarity. They fought a tough fight, but in the end, while a form of 'victory' was declared, they had to just watch the soldiers flatten their hard work like a cardboard box.

Diego leaves his new 'family' to go home – home to his father and mother & sister, living in separate prisons in Cochabamba. The Captain who befriends Diego, hatches a plan to catch the drug ring, while also trying to set in motion the freedom of his innocent parents, arrested years ago.

This novel was just as thrilling and thought-provoking book as the first. It really makes you think what it must be like living in a poor county, where you can't even get enough money to feed your family, let alone put shoes on their feet. What a lucky county we all live in by comparison.

I can't wait for the conclusion to this exciting story!!!

Pauline Dunn, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

Deborah Ellis' name on a book makes us expect a work which has a sympathetic and well-drawn treatment of children in a situation of crisis. Her other books have been set in Afghanistan, Africa, Mediaeval Europe and the Middle East.

Diego's Pride is the sequel to *Diego, Run!*, the story of a boy whose parents are in gaol in Bolivia. This book takes up Diego's story when he has escaped from a gang of cocaine manufacturers and is looked after by small farmers, who, like most others in their area, grow a small crop of coca.

The focus of the story is a road blockade, undertaken by farmers to protest against government plans to confiscate the coca harvest. Based on similar true events, the story is a study in justice, the battle between the disenfranchised and those in power, but, overall, an examination of individuals, bravery, group dynamics and contradictions in people's positions and their behaviour.

The fast pace of the action, interspersed with sharp dialogue, make this a book which will appeal to 10-14 year olds and has the potential to attract male readers. From an adult

perspective, I found *Diego, Run!* a more satisfying read because there were fewer characters, but I am sure my students will enjoy the excitement of *Diego's Pride*.

Barbara Wilson, St George Christian School, NSW

Based on real-life events in modern Bolivia, and supported by extensive research by the author, *Diego's Pride* continues the story of twelve year old Diego Juarez, begun in *Diego, Run!* It can be read as a stand-alone story, and Author Notes regarding the cultural and historical background in Bolivia and a Glossary included in the book, help the reader better understand and appreciate the harsh reality of the situation, one which is beyond our comprehension – such a life for one so young, and so much hardship and suffering. Raw with the physical and emotional scars of work in the coca pits and the cruelty and humiliation he endured, Diego's escape to a coca farm and warm welcome by the Ricardos family offers safety and security. Money he will receive for helping with the coca harvest will get him back home to his parents in Cochabamba to help pay the family debt. He is indeed ever proud, ever loyal. The dislike he faces from their daughter, Bonita, is nothing to the tension which explodes when the Army is sent to destroy the coca crop, and ever resolute and forceful in his defence of the Ricardos, Diego is arrested. He then becomes part of the road blockade and the protest, as cocaleros defend their right to their coca growing livelihood. No longer feeling like a "dumb kid who never did anything right", Diego is accepted in to the community of the bridge, as a runner, a powerful and important role. He has a purpose, protecting people, brave and determined. Simmering tension escalates to confrontation and violence, and Diego, mature beyond his years, stays to fight for justice in this desperate situation, ever honourable, finally to decide if he will return home to the family he loves and misses. "The road to justice is not straight".

Ellis writes simply, but with compassion and honesty, presenting an eye-opening, easy-to-read, accurate and authentic text, to raise reader awareness and advance humanitarian issues. As such, *Diego's Pride* is highly recommended for use as a teacher read-aloud in Year 5-7 classrooms, as a Year 8/9 shared class reader, and for individual borrowing from the school library collection. Diego's hopes and dreams for a better life, and the positive resolution to this book lead us to anticipate that there is still more of the Diego story to be told.

Alison Cassell, QLD

A nice touch, the page and a bit summary of "the story so far," for those who come to this book without having read *Diego, Run* first. And for sure there'll be another one at least: "Maybe, for once, something would be easy. Maybe, for once, something would work 'For you, Mando,' he whispered. Then he got ready to enjoy himself. Justice was about to happen in Cochabamba." (p.170). Doesn't that just beg for a sequel?

Deborah Ellis continues her interest in the plight of children in difficult situations, not of their own making, and in bringing those situations to the attention of those who can, or perhaps in the future will be able to bring some justice to remediate the wrongs. In this book however, I found that although there are several allusions to similar blockades elsewhere in Bolivia, the reader is more reliant than in her other books on the explanations in the Author's Note at the end for the story's setting. So it's good that it's there, and the usual glossary is there too.

Deborah Ellis makes her young characters resourceful and brave. Sometimes she makes gentle suggestions towards solving the social problems facing the communities in her stories and these usually come from the child heroes / heroines themselves, like Diego's idea of bulk farming of guinea pigs in lieu of the forbidden coca crops (p.95).

This book is an easy read, with a big, clear font (12 pt Sabon, I notice), attractive even to reluctant readers but whose well-drawn characters and scenes stay fresh in the reader's mind long after the couple of hours it takes to read. Recommended for junior secondary and thoughtful upper primary students, it has wide reading potential in the study of children in other cultures, contested spaces and personal journey.

Julie Davies, Sutherland Shire Christian School, NSW

The sequel to *Diego, Run* is an excellent book to complete with a Year 8 or 9 English class. There are many opportunities to stimulate interest in students through the character, places or issues that Ellis portrays.

What is also remarkable is that one does not need to have read *Diego, Run* in order to understand the plot of the sequel. Ellis includes enough information to reveal that Mando for example was Diego's friend and that he fell to his death escaping from the men who had imprisoned them both.

Lesson Ideas:

- In addition to completing a lesson on the setting of Bolivia and discussing the issues relating to the coca plant. There are also opportunities to discuss the issues facing farmers in third world countries. Students could be assigned another country which relies heavily on agricultural produce for their economy. They could then be asked to make a presentation relating to some of the issues facing these farmers.
- Another lesson could ask students to create a newspaper article relating to the issues raised by the farmers in the blockade. Some students could present the case for the farmers; others could be writing in favour of the government, another group could be presenting an un-biased case.
- Students could be required to present a debate in which they argue about the rights of the farmers to express their disgust at the government and the rights of the government to ensure security in the country.
- Diego's character is also complex. Students could a series of diary entries in which they empathise with Diego and express how he is feeling at various stages of the text. For instance students could write about how Diego felt living with the Ricardo family. There could be an entry relating to his feelings towards the captain and Bonita. How does Diego feel when he the blockade has been stopped? What are his thoughts about returning home?

This text certainly allows the teacher to complete some interesting exercises to strengthen student's skills and hopefully evoke a love of reading.

Vanessa Wickens, Wyndham College, NSW

Deborah Ellis, the celebrated author who introduced her readership to Afghanistan under the Taliban before most of us could find it on an atlas, has once again constructed a very fine story to raise awareness of injustice and cruelty. This time, the tale (sequel to *Diego, Run!*) is located in Bolivia, where Diego's adopted family earns a meagre living by growing coca - a sacred crop grown traditionally for tea and chewing but unfortunately for the family, also used to manufacture cocaine. In senior primary classes this novel could stimulate powerful discussion about whether a country has the right to intervene in the economy of another for the worthy purposes of preventing curb drug trafficking. In *Diego's Pride*, this intervention takes the form of American payments to Bolivian soldiers to confiscate the coca crops - which destroys the livelihood of small farmers and leaves them destitute.

In desperation, the Ricardos join the blockade which brings Bolivia to a standstill. Diego makes himself useful but it is all to no avail and the blockade is broken up by tanks, rubber bullets and tear gas. He realises that he can do little there to help his family regain their freedom and goes back to do what he can for them while they are in prison. There is some small satisfaction in this somewhat grim story when he is able to identify one of the gringos who kidnapped him to work in the coca pits and get some justice for his friend who was killed there.

Class teachers might usefully read this story to a class as an accompaniment to Drug Education because it shows so graphically how innocent lives far away are ruined by the drug trade.

Lisa Hill, Mossgiel Park Primary School, VIC

I am an avid fan of Deborah Ellis's work, having had success teaching the Parvana novels to various Stage 4 classes. I also devoured her first Diego novel, *Diego's Run*, last year and was

eager to read how the young Bolivian boy fared after the tragic death of his best friend Mando. However, I found this novel quite different to the pace and action of *Diego's Run*, yet still providing exploration of key issues such as conflict (political, family, community and personal conflict), responsibility and growing up. Contextual information (some supplied in the Author's notes, but this is only a starting point) about life in Bolivia is crucial to help students understanding why Diego and the Ricardo family are forced to join the protestors blocking the highway. This knowledge can then be used to analyse and discuss the opposition and challenges the blockade provides for the various characters.

This novel is by no means a challenging read, so it is best placed in Stage 4 and even upper primary. Length also means reading the entire novel in class would be a reasonable option. Diego changes significantly during the novel, and from the first novel, as he faces some harsh realities and questions who he is and where he belongs. His discussions with Bonita are also particularly confronting – '*Our lives, not yours*' and force Diego to doubt himself, his actions and his motivations. Character study of Diego and his potential use as a voice for oppressed people in Bolivia would be a worthwhile activity.

Emma Stevenson, Port Hacking High School, NSW

Deborah Ellis has once again taken us inside another culture, and given us another way of looking at the world. Diego is fighting corruption at all levels. His parents are in gaol, by a corrupt government, the country is exploited by a drug trade run by overseas pressures. Diego is trying to find a fair and just way through this maze. He finds himself on a road blockade fighting the government for a fair deal for the farmers who took him in when he needed help, after he fled his time working in the coca pits.

We see Bolivia from the farmer's point of view as they fight corruption and unfair treatment. Diego's quick wit and nerve are again evident. He manages to stay true to himself and his honesty and integrity shine against the corruption around him. Deborah manages to take us into Diego's world and his mind. The writing is perfection as she takes us into another culture, there is no attempt to explain how or why Bolivia works the way it does. She presents the reader with another point of view another way things can be done. It would be the perfect book (as with any others written by Deborah Ellis) to teach kids to look at another culture.

Dianne Galbraith, Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School, VIC

After the furious pace of the final chapters of *Diego run!*, *Diego's Pride* opens on a scene of almost gentle domesticity. Diego has been with the Ricardo family for a week and is finding points of comparison between this new life and the one he enjoyed with his own family before his parents were sent to prison. This pleasant existence on the Ricardo farm doesn't last long however, and Diego finds himself joining the Ricardos in the cocalers' blockade of the nearby bridge after the soldiers destroy the farmers' coca crop.

In this way, Deborah Ellis introduces her adolescent readers to the plight of the Bolivian coca farmers and the union blockades they organised to bring attention to their situation. Her strong social justice message is carried by her fictional characters who are placed in this factual setting.

However, Diego is no Wally moving through a background of historical events. He is a well rounded character with the hopes and fears of every child, together with a wisdom and compassion that have been broadened by his unique experiences. He again shows himself to be a shrewd observer of human nature, recognising true kindness in the cook, fairness and integrity in the Captain, strength and determination in the union leader Vargas, and the foolish bravado of Leon and Dario. He compares the cold heartedness of the Spanish priest with the generosity and good humour of the Bolivian nuns. Ellis manages a diverse group of characters and shows that goodness, selfishness, honour, and stupidity may be found on both sides of a dispute.

At the end of the story, Diego is back where he started his journey in the first book – outside the prisons in Cochabamba. He has some unfinished business to attend to. He is going to help the Captain break the drug ring and perhaps get his parents out of jail.

Aleyne Cameron, Cleveland District State High School, QLD

Although I had not read *Diego, Run!*, Deborah Ellis has thoughtfully provided the text version of 'in previous episodes...' at the start of her exciting yet sympathetic novel, *Diego's Pride*. This is sufficient to provide the background to the story. There are some references to earlier incidents, but the brief explanations provided are sufficient to maintain the logic and structure of this novel as a 'stand alone'. Ellis has also provided a thoughtful, meaningful dedication; dates; quotations from activists in the Bolivian struggle; a Glossary, and an Author's Note, so readers are well supported.

Ellis's technique of creating a sympathetic child protagonist, enriched and brought to life by extensive research and meticulous attention to detail, is seductive. From the opening line: '*The guinea pigs were loose*', we are drawn immediately into the world of the Bolivian *campesinos*.

Ellis creates a vivid portrait of normal domesticity, but this is in great contrast to the political environment within which ordinary people endeavour to go about their lives.

The reasons for their civil protest are stark. For the reader there is a great moral dilemma, as we find ourselves supporting the growing of coca, from which the Bolivian small farmers derive an income and a stimulant, coca, which helps them to endure their harsh living conditions; and from which the Western world derives the illegal drug cocaine, a multi million dollar underworld industry.

For Australian readers, safe and comfortable despite natural catastrophes of drought, fire, flood; and worries about Western diseases of abundance and carelessness this world is unfamiliar, yet familiar. The aspirations of the central characters are universal; family, love, care of children, safety, happiness, food, shelter. The culture is somewhat exotic, yet familiar too; with animals part of the household, young men drinking beer and showing off their manhood inappropriately. There are soldiers and nuns sympathetic to their concerns, and '*gringo backpackers*' who seem to think they are taking part in an episode of reality TV. On the whole, a 'good read'; but a thoughtful one too. It would be interesting to hear what Australian students from places where war, civil protest, and physical danger from authorities are part of the everyday fabric of life think about the way Ellis deals with the issues raised in this book.

Helen Wilde, SA