

READING GROUP GUIDE

THE HUNGER GAMES AND CATCHING FIRE



BY SUZANNE COLLINS

ABOUT THE HUNGER GAMES

In this gripping young adult novel set in a future with unsettling parallels to our present, the nation of Panem consists of a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying Districts, in the ruins of the area once known as North America. Sixteen-year-old Katniss and her friend Gale forage for food in the woods surrounding their impoverished District, in this stratified society where the Capitol controls all resources. The main support for both their families, Katniss and Gale are apprehensive of the approaching annual Reaping, when two “tributes” between the ages of twelve and eighteen will be chosen by lottery from each of the twelve districts to compete in The Hunger Games, a survival contest on live TV in which teenagers fight to the death and there can be only one victor.

When her beloved younger sister Prim is chosen as one of the tributes, Katniss volunteers to go in her sister’s place. Her fellow tribute from District 12 is Peeta, a boy with whom she soon develops a complicated relationship. After traveling to the Capitol and undergoing elaborate training and preparation, Katniss and Peeta are launched into the game. In the terrifying events that follow, Katniss must marshal all her skills to stay alive and all her emotions to remain a caring human being in the face of the stark brutality of the Games.

“It’s hard to choose one element that inspired *The Hunger Games*,” says Suzanne Collins. “Probably the first seeds were planted when, as an eight-year-old with a mythology obsession, I read the story of Theseus. The myth told how in punishment for past deeds, Athens periodically had to send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete where they were thrown in the Labyrinth and devoured by the monstrous Minotaur. Even as a third grader, I could appreciate the ruthlessness of this message. ‘Mess with us and we’ll do something worse than kill you. We’ll kill your children.’”

“Other early influences would have to include watching too many gladiator movies which dramatized the Romans’ flair for turning executions into popular entertainment, my military specialist dad who took us to battlefields for family vacations, and touring with a sword-fighting company in high school. But it wasn’t until the much more recent experience of channel surfing between reality TV programming and actual war coverage that the story for this series came to me.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE HUNGER GAMES

1. How does Katniss feel about the country of Panem? Why does she need to make her face “an indifferent mask” and be careful what she says in public?
2. Describe the relationships of Katniss with Gale, with Prim, with her mother. How do those relationships define her personality? Why does she say about Peeta, “I feel like I owe him something, and I hate owing people.” How does her early encounter with Peeta affect their relationship after they are chosen as tributes?
3. How does the fact that the tributes are always on camera affect their behavior from the time they are chosen? Does it make it easier or harder for them to accept their fate? How are the “career tributes” different from the others?
4. Why are the tributes given stylists and dressed so elaborately for the opening ceremony? Does this ceremony remind you of events in our world, either past or present? Compare those ceremonies in real life to the one in the story.
5. When Peeta declares his love for Katniss in the interview, does he really mean it or did Haymitch create the “star-crossed lovers” story? What does Haymitch mean when he says, “It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived.” Why do they need to impress sponsors and what are those sponsors looking for when they are watching the Games?
6. Before the Games start, Peeta tells Katniss, “... I want to die as myself... I don’t want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I’m not.” What does this tell you about Peeta? What does he fear more than death? Is he able to stay true to himself during the Games?
7. Why does Katniss ignore Haymitch’s advice to head directly away from the Cornucopia? Did she do the right thing to fight for equipment? What are the most important skills she has for staying alive—her knowledge of nature?—her skill with bow and arrow?—her trapping ability? What qualities of her personality keep her going—her capacity for love?—her intelligence?—her self-control?
8. Why does Peeta join with the Career Tributes in the beginning of the Games? What does he hope to gain? Why do they accept him when they start hunting as a group? Why do groups form in the beginning when they know only one of them will be able to survive?
9. What makes Katniss and Rue trust each other to become partners? What does Katniss gain from this friendship besides companionship? Is Katniss and Rue’s partnership formed for different reasons than the other group’s?
10. Discuss the ways in which the Gamemakers control the environment and “entertainment” value of the Games. How does it affect the tributes to know they are being manipulated to make the Games more exciting for the gamblers and viewers? Does knowing that she is on live TV make Katniss behave differently than she would otherwise?
11. When does Katniss first realize that Peeta does care for her and is trying to keep her alive? When does she realize her own feelings for him? Did Haymitch think all along that he could keep them both alive by stressing the love story? Are they actually in love?
12. What do you think is the cruelest part of the Hunger Games? What kind of people would devise this spectacle for the entertainment of their populace? Can you see parallels between these Games and the society that condones them, and other related events and cultures in the history of the world?
13. In 1848, Karl Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Discuss this statement as it applies to the society and government of Panem. Do you believe there is any chance to eradicate class struggles in the future?
14. Reality TV has been a part of the entertainment world since the early days of television (with shows such as *Candid Camera* and the *Miss America Pageant*), but in the twenty-first century there has been a tremendous growth of competitive shows and survival shows. Discuss this phenomenon with respect to *The Hunger Games*. What other aspects of our popular culture do you see reflected in this story?



ABOUT *CATCHING FIRE*

Katniss and Peeta have returned to their home District, but the return is hardly triumphant. Haunted by nightmares of the brutal deaths in the arena, Katniss is confused by her feelings for Peeta, while her relationship with her hunting partner and oldest friend, Gale, is changed in subtle ways. Most challenging, though, is her relationship to the leaders in the Capitol. Her act of defiance in attempting a double suicide at the end of the Games forced them to allow both her and Peeta to live, and there are intimations that Katniss has now become a symbol for rebellion in the Districts. The Victory Tour, designed to remind the people in the Districts of the power of the Capitol, may be having quite a different effect this year.

Then the president announces plans for the Quarter Quell, the seventy-fifth anniversary Games. Every twenty-five years the Capitol devises a new twist for the reaping, and this year they announce that the tributes will be chosen from among the victors of previous Games. Thrown into the arena once more with Peeta, Katniss's strategy must be different this year, but even Katniss doesn't realize all the implications of these Games and the outside forces that are gathering strength to potentially undermine the entire society.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *CATCHING FIRE*

1. How did Katniss's participation in the Games change her relationship with Gale? Why does she say, "The Games have spoiled even that....There's no going back."
2. What emotions does Peeta stir in Katniss? Though she is stiff and formal with him, what are her true feelings? How did the events in the first Games affect their relationship?
3. Why does President Snow come to Katniss's home? What does he mean when he says, "... you have provided a spark which left unattended may grow into an inferno...." What, exactly, was the significance of the handful of poisonous berries at the end of The Hunger Games?
4. How do the events of the Victory Tour affect Katniss and Peeta, their relationship to each other, and their feelings about their future?
5. Why does the Capitol devise a special reaping procedure for every twenty-fifth Game? Do you believe the requirements for this Quarter Quell were decided in the past or were they designed for this Game to force Katniss and Peeta back to the Arena?
6. What is the significance of the mockingjay image? What does it mean to the people in the Districts and the people in the Capitol? Why does Plutarch Heavensbee show Katniss the hidden mockingjay image on his watch? Discuss how the mockingjay species developed and how Katniss happened to wear the pin during the first Games.
7. Why does Gale refuse Katniss's offer to try to escape into the wild? What does he mean when he says, "It can't be about just saving us anymore"? How does Gale's whipping change Katniss's thinking about escape and her feelings for Gale?
8. What makes Katniss say, "No wonder I won the Games. No decent person ever does." Is she being too hard on herself? What makes her realize that fighting the Capitol is more important than running away? What is the importance of her meeting with Bonnie and Twill in the forest?
9. Why does the Capitol push plans for the wedding of Katniss and Peeta if they know that they will be returning to the Games in the Quarter Quell? What does the Capitol hope to gain by sending previous victors back to the Games? Is it really, as Katniss says, a way to show "that hope was an illusion"?
10. What do Katniss and Peeta learn when they watch the video of Haymitch's Hunger Games: the Second Quarter Quell? How does it affect their understanding of Haymitch and the mockingjay symbol? How did Haymitch trick the Capitol?
11. How do both Peeta and Katniss mock the Gamemakers during the "talent show" portion of the training? Why do they each take the chance of offending those who will control the Games? How does this change their feelings for each other?
12. Discuss the effect on Katniss of what happens to Darius and Cinna. Why are the Capitol officials attacking those who have befriended her? Why is Cinna attacked just before Katniss is placed in the Arena?
13. Why is Katniss determined to keep Peeta alive during the Games, even at the expense of her own life? When does she realize the importance of forming alliances with the other tributes? Why does Finnick save Peeta's life? When does Katniss realize that her first impression of Finnick was wrong?
14. Describe the relationship between Katniss and Johanna. What made Katniss realize that Wiress and Beetee would be helpful allies in the Arena? What important contribution does each one of the allies make to keep the group alive? What is the role of the unseen "sponsors"?
15. What is more harmful to the players in this Game—the physical traumas like the fog and rain of fire, or the emotional trauma of hearing the jabberjays?
16. What does Haymitch mean when he tells Katniss before the Game begins, "You just remember who the enemy is—that's all." Who is the enemy? Have the other tributes been trying to keep Peeta or Katniss alive? Which of them is most important to the rebellion?
17. Why were Katniss and Peeta not aware of the plans for the rebellion? Why were they kept in the dark when other tributes knew about it?
18. What is the meaning of the title? How many different ways can you identify the theme of "catching fire" in this volume?

COMPARING THE BOOKS

1. Discuss the differences between the Games in the first volume and the second—the training sessions, the interviews, the set-up of the Arena, the strategies that Katniss and Peeta use. How is each of them changed by the time they spend in the Arena?
2. What are the forces that contribute to the rebellion in *Catching Fire*? Were they already starting to happen in *The Hunger Games*? What clues about the rebellion can you find in the books?
3. Why are all citizens of Panem required to watch The Hunger Games on television? How does this affect the people? Why haven't they rebelled earlier against the brutality of the Games? Discuss the effect of television and reality TV in your own life.
4. What are your predictions for the third volume in the series?
5. Compare the society in Panem (the government, its tight control on the population, and the growing rebellion) to others that you have studied or encountered in books or films. Consider historical and contemporary nations as well as fictional worlds. What does Panem have in common with these cultures, and how does it differ? What can we learn about our own world from studying and reading about historical and fictional societies?

CONNECT TO THE CLASSICS

The themes and setting of *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* can be connected for teen readers to many pieces of classic literature that are required reading for high school students.

Greek legend tells how King Minos of Crete demanded that seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls be sacrificed in the labyrinth of the Minotaur until the hero Theseus volunteered to go in the place of one of the youths and was able to slay the monster.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, set in the Dust Bowl years in the United States, extreme hunger leads ordinary people to seek extraordinary ways to stay alive during the Great Depression.

The futuristic novels *Brave New World*, *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451* all reflect the rigid control and stratified society of the populace that we see in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*.

The Lord of the Flies explores how vicious young people can become, when forced to survive in a wilderness setting.

“The Lottery,” a short story by Shirley Jackson, first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, is a chilling tale of ritualistic murder committed as a fertility rite in small-town America (*The Lottery and Other Stories*, 2nd edition, by Shirley Jackson, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

FICTION

Feed, by M. T. Anderson (Candlewick Press, 2004)
In this futuristic society, a “feed” is embedded in the brain of every person to keep up a steady stream of information, entertainment, communication, and ultimately, control. Survival in this world depends on how well your individual “feed” is functioning and how well you fit in with the popular culture.

GemX, by Nicki Singer (Holiday House, 2008)
A future society is divided into the “Enhanced” and the “Natural Born,” both manipulated by a heartless ruler; but love reaches across the society’s barriers and brings hope to a few.

Graceling, by Kristin Cashore (Harcourt, 2008)
Lady Katsa, graced with the ability to win every fight, defies her tyrannical uncle, and through her own feelings of compassion and her growing friendship with a foreign prince, finds her own way in the world.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, by J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 2000)
In his fourth year at Hogwarts School, Harry’s name is mysteriously chosen in a lottery to compete in the Triwizard Tournament that pits champions from several schools against each other in a contest of magical skills, reasoning powers, wit, and endurance.

Sunrise Over Fallujah, by Walter Dean Myers (Scholastic, 2008)
The actual arena of a war zone in Iraq provides a setting in which present-day soldiers must be constantly alert to stay alive while making difficult decisions about who are potential allies and who are their true enemies.

Uglies, by Scott Westerfeld (Simon Pulse, 2005)
A compulsory operation at the age of sixteen creates a uniform standard of “beauty” in a futuristic society. The story continues in *Pretties* (2005), *Specials* (2006), and *Extras* (2007).

Unwind, by Neal Shusterman (Simon & Schuster, 2007)
Connor, Risa, and Lev are literally running for their lives in the future world where troubled teens may be chosen by a parent for “unwinding,” in which their body parts are harvested for use by other people.

NONFICTION

Black Potatoes, by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)
Hunger and starvation during the potato famine of 1845–1850 affected the lives of millions in Ireland, while the stratified society of Irish peasants and English overlords contributed to the brutality of the situation.

Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why, by Laurence Gonzales (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004)
An exploration of the biological and psychological reasons people risk their lives and why some are better at it than others.

The Night Olympic Team: Fighting to Keep Drugs Out of the Games, by Caroline Hatton (Boyd’s Mills Press, 2008)
Behind the scenes at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, a team of scientists works through the night to discover the use of performance enhancing drugs in the athletes.

Rock, Paper, Scissors: Game Theory in Everyday Life, by Len Fisher (Basic Books, 2008)
A Nobel-prize winner discusses the theory behind decisions people make in competitive situations and the strategies that can change the outcome of their actions.

Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie, and Video Game Violence, by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (The Crown Publishing Group, 1999)
This book presents an argument, based on research, against the influences that incite violent actions in youth today.

The Worst Hard Time, by Timothy Egan (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)
Egan relates a chilling chronicle of starvation and hardship during the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s in the American Midwest, when economic issues and environmental disasters combined to change the lives of an entire population.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzanne Collins has had a successful and prolific career writing for children's television. She has worked on the staffs of several Nickelodeon shows, including the Emmy-nominated hit *Clarissa Explains It All* and *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*. She received a Writer's Guild of America nomination in animation for co-writing the critically acclaimed Christmas special, *Santa, Baby!*

Suzanne Collins made her mark in children's literature with the *New York Times* bestselling series the Underland Chronicles, for middle grade readers. Her debut novel, *Gregor the Overlander*, received numerous accolades both in the United States and abroad.

Suzanne Collins lives with her family in Connecticut.



Photo Credit: Cap Pryor

CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR *THE HUNGER GAMES*

“I was so obsessed with this book.” —Stephenie Meyer, author of the Twilight Saga

“I couldn't stop reading...addictive.” — Stephen King, *Entertainment Weekly*

“Brilliantly plotted and perfectly paced.” —*The New York Times*

The Hunger Games

by Suzanne Collins

Ages 12 & up, 0-439-02348-3, \$17.99

Catching Fire

by Suzanne Collins

Ages 12 & up, 0-439-02349-1, \$17.99

Both books are available from your local bookstore or usual supplier, or from:
Scholastic, 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

www.scholastic.com/thehungergames

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the H. W. Wilson Junior Authors and Illustrators series.



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