READING GROUP GUIDE

THE HUNGER GAMES AND CATCHING FIRE

BY SUZANNE COLLINS
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.”

**About The Hunger Games**

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**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 groups?
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?
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 all over again, Katniss and Peeta must face the challenges of the Games once more with Peeta, Katniss's strategy must be different this year, but even Katniss doesn't realize that the tributes will be chosen from among the victors of previous Games.

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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.

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


SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

FICTION

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.

Gracling, 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 Tchizard Tournament that pits champions from several schools against each other in a contest of magical skills, reasoning powers, wit, and endurance.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, by J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 2003)
Harry, Ron, and Hermione investigate the mysterious death of Alanominus Gwyddon, a wizard who has used his powers for evil.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, by J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 2005)
Harry’s seventh year at Hogwarts School begins with what seems like the most promising start, but there is an ominous threat growing.

Hunger Games, by Thomas Krus (Scholastic, 2004)
A dystopian future of a post-apocalyptic world where the rich live in luxury and the poor struggle to survive.

Nineteen-Eighty-Four, by George Orwell (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)
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.

Old Westelers, by Scott Westerfeld (Simon Pulse, 2005)
In a world where the government controls everyone, a young woman must fight against the government to save her brother.

Catching Fire, by Suzanne Collins (Scholastic, 2009)
The second book in the Hunger Games series continues the story of Katniss and Peeta’s journey to save their loved ones.

A graphic novel that follows the adventures of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in a future where their world is at risk.

NONFICTION

Feed, by Neal Shusterman (Simon & Schuster, 2008)
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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.

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*

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**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](http://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.