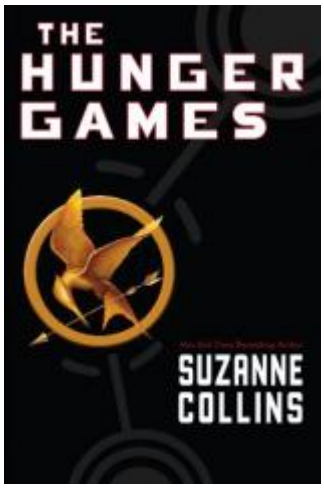
The Hunger Games

by Suzanne Collins



About the Book

In this gripping young adult novel set in a future with unsettling parallels to our present, the nation of Panem consists of a shining Capital 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 Capital 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 12 and 18 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 Capital 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.

Discussion Guide

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 21st 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?

Comparing *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire:*

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 can you find in the books about the rebellion?

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?

Author Bio

Suzanne Collins is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling *Underland Chronicles* series, which has more than one million books in print and is available in seven foreign editions. In the award-winning THE HUNGER GAMES, for which rights have been sold for 35 foreign language editions to date, Collins continues to explore the effects of war and violence on those coming of age. Also a successful writer for children's television, Collins lives with her family in Connecticut.

Critical Praise

"Collins has written a compulsively readable blend of science fiction, survival story, unlikely romance, and social commentary."

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