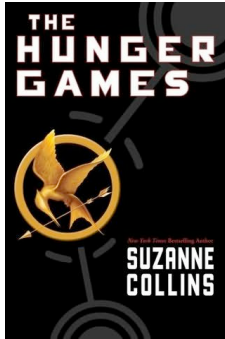


## The Hunger Games

### Concept/Vocabulary Analysis

**Literary Text:** The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (Scholastic Press First Edition)

#### Summary



The United States government has been dissolved, and in its place is a dystopian society known as Panem. Panem is made up of the Capitol and thirteen surrounding districts that take up the mass of the entire modern US. After District 13 is completely annihilated for revolting against the Capitol, the government implements the Hunger Games, a gladiator-like televised event in which one boy and one girl, aged between twelve and eighteen, from each district must fight each other to the death. After her younger sister gets randomly chosen to participate in the Hunger Games, sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen volunteers in her place.

#### Organizational Patterns

*The Hunger Games* is organized into parts and chapters. There are twenty-seven untitled chapters, ranging in length from ten to seventeen pages. These twenty-seven chapters are then broken up into three parts titled “The Tributes,” “The Games,” and “The Victor.” Part I consists of getting to know the narrator, Katniss, and the other twenty-three tributes (or victims) who have been chosen in the Reaping to go to the Hunger Games, through her perspective. Part II is the narration of the Hunger Games and Katniss’ experience in the arena. Finally, Part III is about the victor of the games, the activities that take place after winning the Hunger Games, and the consequences of winning (both positive and negative).

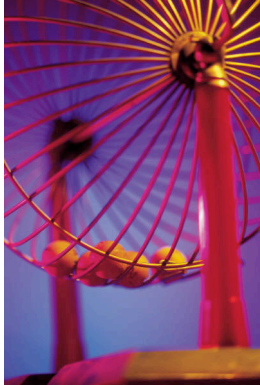
#### Issues Related to this Study of Literature

##### THEME

**Poverty/Class Distinction** – One of the major themes of *The Hunger Games* is the concept of poverty and an uneven distribution of wealth and resources. This theme is especially prevalent in Part I of the book where we become familiar with Katniss’ home district. Katniss lives in a section of District 12 known as the Seam. The name alone, lends itself to the idea that this place is an unpleasant one. The members of this community are so poor, that starvation is not uncommon. In Part I, Katniss describes how many of the residents of the Seam work in the mines (District 12 used to be Appalachia) and are extremely poor. Residents of town, in contrast, are more of an aristocratic society and have more of their needs met. The final economic group in District 12 is the members of the



government, called Peacekeepers. These people can pay for and do whatever they like. The important distinction between these economic classes is how they are treated by other members of their society and by the government.



**Living in a Dystopian Society** – Panem is a severely dystopian society. All citizens, regardless of economic status are oppressed by the government situated thousands of miles away in the Capitol (modern day Rocky Mountains). It is the poor citizens, however, that are the most affected. Weapons are not allowed in Panem. Katniss explains that if the government had realized that her father was creating bows and arrows (for hunting) they would have executed him. Hunting itself is against the law, which makes it very difficult for the lower class to eat. Katniss often refers to the uprising, a revolt led by the thirteen districts against the capitol. The result was the defeat of twelve districts and the complete destruction of District 13. Now the government expects all twelve remaining districts to participate in a yearly-televised event called the Hunger Games. In these games, each district must choose two tributes, one boy and one girl aged between twelve and eighteen, by lottery. These tributes are then sent to the Capitol to face off in a fight to the death. The winner gets a life of ease, wealth, and comfort. Citizens must attend all ceremonies of the Hunger Games or they will be imprisoned. As in most dystopian societies, speaking or acting against the government in any way is punishable by death. Nothing about this society is free or just.

**Sacrifice** – Throughout the novel, Katniss is faced with many situations in which she must sacrifice something. In Part I, she generally sacrifices attachment to others in order to protect herself. The one exception to this is the love she has for her sister, Prim. This love drives Katniss to take Prim's place, when Prim is chosen as a tribute for the Hunger Games. In this instance, Katniss is willing to sacrifice her life to save Prim's. Later, Katniss must sacrifice her identity in order to maintain an expected appearance on television. Katniss, and other characters sacrifice many things throughout the novel, and in other instances, they do not. This sacrifice and lack there of begs the question what is worth sacrificing and for what?

### **Violence on Television/Reality**

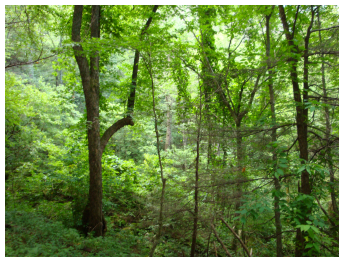
**Television** – In the novel, the Hunger Games are a televised event where twenty-four teenagers are pitted against each other. In this arena, it's "kill or be killed." Throughout the novel, Katniss refers to previous years of the games that were found to be boring because the tributes died by freezing or by being bitten by venomous snakes. She asks, "Where is the fun in that?" In the Hunger Games, the citizens of the Capitol and more wealthy districts want to see the teenagers locked in battle, fighting for the right to live. In fact, the only boundary seems to be cannibalism, after a tribute in a previous year started eating the other tributes he had killed. The citizens found this to be too disturbing, apparently. While the novel itself is not overtly



violent, violence is often mentioned. The fact that this killing event is televised can lead to some great discussions in class about violence on television. Reality television has been a major trend in televised programs over the last ten to twenty years. It is clear that almost all aspects of the Hunger Games are completely fabricated. How the tributes dress, how they act, the weather in the arena, and various other elements are created by the Gamemakers. How much of reality television is real? In *The Hunger Games*, not much.

**Other Themes** – Cruelty vs. Altruism, Appearance vs. Reality, Hope, Humanity, and Loyalty

## SETTING



*The Hunger Games* takes place in what once was North America. Due to various disasters, America has been dissolved, and a dystopian government called Panem has been established in its stead. The two main places that the novel takes place in are District 12 and the Capitol. Katniss explains that District 12 is situated in the Appalachian Mountains and there is a large mining community. Because of this, it is a safe guess to say District 12 is somewhere around where modern day West Virginia is. Woods surround the district, as well as an electric fence that exist as much for keeping people in as keeping animals out. The Capitol is situated in the Rocky Mountain or modern day Colorado. The Capitol is a very technological, modern city. The citizens are extremely happy, overly friendly, and dress in extreme styles (such as orange hair). Once the Hunger Games begins, Katniss spends most of her time in “the arena,” which is an indoor arena created to look like a forest.

## CONFLICT

**Internal:** Katniss has many internal conflicts throughout *The Hunger Games*. Katniss often struggles with whether or not she should give up. She wonders if she has the strength to kill other human beings. In the end, Katniss always sides with survival because she promised her sister, Prim, that she would try to stay alive. As Prim is the only person that Katniss is sure she loves, she cannot, no matter what, break that promise. Another internal conflict that appears in the book is that regarding her feelings for Gale and Peeta. She really likes both Gale and Peeta, but she is constantly struggle with how much. Before the Reaping, Katniss contemplates leaving the Seam with Gale, though she eventually states that her feelings for Gale are not romantic. Later, during the Hunger Games, Katniss is conflicted with how to behave with Peeta. She knows she does not love him, but she feels she must keep up appearances in order to keep her sponsors. This leads to the most important internal conflict, appearance vs. reality.



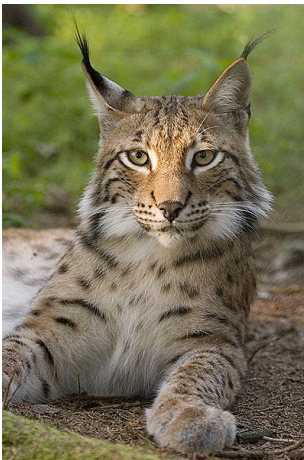
Katniss is constantly struggling with whether she should be herself, or whether she should lie and keep up appearances in order to survive in the games. Sometimes honesty wins, but other times appearances do.

**External:** Katniss' external conflicts are apparent throughout the book. One very obvious external conflict that Katniss deals with is the conflict she has with the other tributes. She has to fight and kill them on many occasions throughout the book. Katniss also has conflicts with Haymitch and Effie in order to get and maintain sponsors. Sometimes what Haymitch wants and what Katniss wants are two different things. Another conflict that Katniss encounters is when the Gamemakers try to change the rules and force Katniss and Peeta to kill each other. She knows that by not following the rules, she and Peeta will be openly disobeying the Capitol, but she does what she believes to be right. Conflict is so important in this book that Katniss even mentions conflicts that she had to deal with before the books beginning. For example, Katniss is in a constant struggle to keep her sister and herself fed.



#### POINT OF VIEW, NARRATIVE VOICE

The novel is a first person narrative and is told from the perspective of Katniss Everdeen, a 16-year-old girl living in District 12 of Panem. Katniss is an extremely intelligent and resourceful girl who has had an incredibly difficult life. Because of this, she chooses not to become attached to people, with one exception—her sister, Prim.



Katniss is extremely practical. Katniss describes a time when a kitten showed up at her door and she considered drowning it. After all, to Katniss it was just one more mouth to feed. However, she decided to let Prim keep him and in the end was pleased with her choice because of the cat's ability to hunt for himself and keep Prim happy. Katniss also relays a story in which a lynx started following her. While she enjoyed its company, in the end she was forced to kill it because it would scare away the other game, and food is always first in Katniss' life. She concludes the story by telling the reader that she had earned a good deal for its pelt. To many readers, Katniss' thoughts and actions may seem cruel, but in a dystopian society where starvation is a real threat, she is just being practical.

Katniss takes this practical mindset with her to the Hunger Games, but as the story progresses, we see Katniss release some of her well-built barriers and begin to let certain characters into her heart. For example, she does all that she can in order to keep Rue, a small girl who is also a tribute in the Hunger Games, alive. The same goes for her relationship with Peeta. Katniss risks a lot, including her life, in order to help Peeta survive.

Because the entire story is told from Katniss' perspective the reader is heavily influenced by her biases. Even still, she is a descriptive narrator and offers plenty of insights, not only into her own life, but also into the people around her.

### **Affective Issues Related to the Work**

Students should be able to relate to Katniss and the other characters on a variety of levels and topics. First, while few, if any, student will have ever had to risk their lives in order to help someone they love, many will be able to sympathize with Katniss' decision to save her sister. I think this idea is something all people consider. Could I be strong enough to save someone I love, even if it meant my own life?

Students will also be able to consider the opposite. Katniss is forced to actually kill people in order to stay alive and I think many students will be disturbed by this idea. It is something that the teacher should definitely bring up. Is it ever okay to kill another human being? Does Katniss ever cross the boundary between acceptable self-defense and murder?



Students will be able to relate to Katniss' internal conflicts with her feelings. All students, male and female, will have experienced confusion over their feelings for another person. Katniss really struggles with her feelings for both Peeta and Gale and I think students will empathize with her. Also, many students will be able to relate to Peeta and Katniss' relationship. It is extremely common for one student to feel strongly about a member of the opposite sex and to not have those feelings reciprocated.

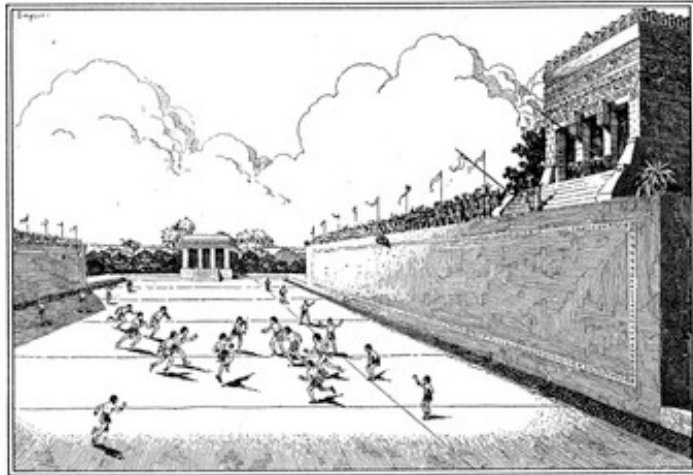
Finally, students will be able to relate with Katniss' struggles with her identity. At the beginning of the story, Katniss has a strong sense of who she is and what she is willing to do. However, throughout the story, she changes and some of her convictions lose their strength. This can be extremely discomfobulating, and it is something that most teenagers have or will deal with at some point in their teen years.

### **Vocabulary Issues**

*The Hunger Games* is written in very basic language. Students of ages ranging from seventh grade to twelfth grade should have no trouble reading and understanding this text. The only foreseeable struggle students may have is with the language used to describe certain things in Katniss' world. For example, she refers to people named Peacekeepers and Gamemakers. If students struggle to pick up on the language, they may miss the fact that Peacekeepers are the government police who oppress the citizens and the Gamemakers are those who keep track of everything in the game and try to manipulate the results. Apart from this problem, students should find the text engaging, but simple.

## Background Knowledge

Students can enjoy *The Hunger Games* with little to no background knowledge as the author provides most of the knowledge you need to understand the world in which Katniss lives. Even still, some background knowledge on various subjects could help to enhance students reading. For example, it could be helpful for students to understand or develop what they believe to be qualities in a dystopian or utopian society. In connection with this development, knowledge regarding dystopian societies in the past and today's world would be great to have in order to make text-to-world connections. It might also be enlightening for the teacher to provide the students with a map of Panem. This can help them realize how far disconnected District 12 is from the Capitol and other districts. Finally, it would be helpful for students to have a working understanding of narrative, setting, and theme to help them better understand the novel and to get more out of it.



## Implications for Student Diversity



*The Hunger Games* has little to no mention of ethnic diversity. However, because of the uneven distribution of wealth, there is definitely economic diversity. The characters in the book range from backgrounds of extreme poverty to extreme wealth. Even still, these characters are able to help and uplift each other. For example, though Madge, the mayor's daughter, has had an extremely easy life, she gives Katniss a token to help her in the hunger games. Perhaps even more uplifting is

the story about Peeta, the baker's son, giving Katniss bread when she and her sister had nothing to eat. While these characters come from diverse backgrounds, they are still all human beings, and they should, and do, help each other.

Another aspect of diversity is in the difference of the districts. The twelve districts are so far removed that they have their own cultures. In many ways, it is as if each district is its own separate



country (this can especially be seen in the description of their breads). These cultures meet when the tributes go to the Capitol, and compete in the Hunger Games. While some cultures clash, others compliment each other and great friendships are formed, such as the friendship between Katniss and Rue.

## Gender Issues



The Hunger Games does not really deal with gender issues. Katniss is a girl who is just as smart, strong, and resourceful as any of the boys in the story. Even still, the author never seems to point this out. It just is. Katniss even casually mentions women who work in the mines. Even in today's society that is not common. Males and females seem to be completely equal in this society

## The Central Question/Enduring Issue

### SURVIVAL

**What would you do to survive?:** *The Hunger Games* is all about Katniss and the things she has to do to survive. Not only does this question pertain to the Hunger Games themselves, where she is often confronted with taking another person's life to survive, but in other aspects of her life as well. In the Seam, Katniss is willing to risk imprisonment or worse by hunting in the woods so that she and her sister have enough to eat to survive. She decides to engage in a romance with someone she possibly does not love in order to keep her sponsors happy, ultimately keeping her and Peeta alive.

**What things are worth living or dying for?:** Many of Katniss' motivations throughout the story have to do with the survival of other characters. She is willing to potentially die so that her sister can survive. She is also willing to fight in order to live for the same reason. Katniss often contemplates whether she is willing to die so that Peeta can live. For Katniss, the only thing worth living or dying for seems to be her sister, Prim. Likewise, Peeta risks his survival by pretending to ally with the Careers. He does this so that Katniss can survive and go home to her family.



**What does a community or society do to survive?:** One of the most pressing questions for the reader is wondering why no one stops the Hunger Games. Obviously they are a savage ceremony meant to cause intimidation, but why do the citizens of Panem take it? The answer is, survival. This aspect shows that society and communities are often willing to accept heinous things in order to survive. The twelve remaining districts saw what happened to District 13 and they fear the same fate. This is why they refuse to do anything to end the Hunger Games.

## Project Ideas

### PICTURE PANEM

**Map** – Have the students create a map of Panem on large poster boards in groups of four. Have them include where the Capitol is and where they think all the districts are. Have the students identify where they think the arena is located. (Providing the students with a general map of the United States on a large poster board would be very helpful for the students).



**Diorama** – Have the students create a diorama of the arena. The landscape should include at least one of the main sites that are included in the novel.

### CREATING CONNECTIONS

**Creating Creatures** – In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss mentions several genetically altered creatures, such as the mockingjays and the tracker jackers. Have the students create their own creature creations. Just as the mockingjays and tracker jackers were created by the Capitol for a purpose, so too must the students come up with a purpose that their creatures accomplish. Have the students do a one page write up on their creature and a visual representation (drawing, painting, stuffed animal, etc.).

**Random Acts of Kindness** – *The Hunger Games* is filled with examples of individuals who help others for no purpose other than helping them. For example, Peeta throws Katniss the bread when she is starving. Another example is when Katniss takes Prim's place in the reaping. Encourage the students to perform random acts of kindness whenever the opportunity arises. At the end of the unit, have the students complete a reflection on what they gained from the experience. More than anything, the students should learn that the value of helping others is in the fact that they made someone else's life easier or better.



**Interesting Interviews** – Have the students create interview questions that they would like to ask a specific character. Students should be encouraged to choose any character, including minor characters such as Cato. After the students create the questions they would like to ask, they should then write answers for to the questions for the characters. The students should make inferences from the text in order to come up with character motivations. The students should also try to answer the questions in the characters voice. How would my character answer this question?