

thESource *Book Talk*

The Hunger Games

by Hannah Miller and Jamie Walters

Summary:

The Hunger Games, a young adult dystopian piece of fiction, was first published in 2008 and is a #1 New York Times Bestseller. It is the first of a trilogy telling the story of Panem and its narrator, Katniss Everdeen. Katniss is a sixteen-year-old girl living with her mother and younger sister in the poorest district of Panem, the remains of what used be the United States. Long ago the districts waged war on the Capitol and were defeated. As part of the surrender terms, each district agreed to send one boy and one girl to appear in an annual televised event called "The Hunger Games." The terrain, rules and level of audience participation may change but one thing is constant: kill or be killed. When her sister is chosen by lottery, Katniss steps up to go in her place. (www.suzannecollinsbooks.com)

The Capitol and the Game Makers, who rather enjoy watching twenty-four children kill each other on what is essentially reality TV, require the Districts to treat the Games as a festivity, a sporting event. The last Tribute alive receives a life of ease back home and their District receives gifts of grain, oil and sugar for a year. Throughout the story of *The Hunger Games*, an air of rebellion and uprising develops, however, it is the subsequent books, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, that flesh out these ideas.

The film adaptation was released March 23, 2012.

Length: 374 pages

Location: Panem (the ruins of North America have been divided into thirteen districts, each with their own industry, and the shining Capitol); The Arena (a vast outdoor area in which the Games are played, varies from year to year)

Recommended Reading Age: thirteen and up (due to some violence)

Characters

Katniss Everdeen: Sixteen years old. The main character and narrator of the story, everything is seen through her perspective. She is tough, strong and self-reliant. Since her father was killed in a mining accident when she was eleven, she has been providing for the family by hunting outside the District.

Peeta Mellark: Sixteen years old. Baker's son. He is described as genuine and funny. Becomes partner to and love-interest for Katniss during the Games.

District 12:

Gale Hawthorne: Eighteen years old. Katniss' best friend and fellow hunter. Provides for his mother and two brothers after the death of his father in the same accident that took Katniss' father.

Primrose Everdeen: Twelve years old. Younger sister of Katniss. Studies healing from her mother.

Haymitch Abernathy: Paunchy, middle-aged man, likes to drink. Participated in and won the Games thirty plus years ago. The sole living victor from the District. Serves as mentor for Katniss and Peeta.

Capitol:

Effie Trinket: District 12's escort to the Games. Responsible for drawing the Tributes' names at the Reaping and advocates for its Tributes during the Games.

Cinna: Katniss' stylist for the Games. His well-calculated costuming seems to inspire those watching the Games to support Katniss.

Portia: Peeta's stylist for the Games. Works to coordinate (sometimes match) costumes with Cinna/Katniss.

Venia/Flavius/Octavia: Katniss' prep team for the Games. Work closely with Cinna. Excitable and eccentric.

President Snow: President of Panem. Plays a bigger role in *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*.

Tributes of note:

*NOTE: There are twenty-four Tributes to the Games, a male and female from each District. All tributes are between the ages of twelve and eighteen years old and vary in build and training.

The Careers: Those Tributes from Districts 1, 2 and 4. Marvel and Glimmer (District 1), and Clove and Cato (District 2) are the Tributes of note.

Foxface: Sly, quick.

Thresh & Rue: From District 11, whose industry is Agriculture. Rue, twelve years old and small, becomes Katniss' ally during the Games.

Synopsis:

The story opens with our protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, on "Reaping Day."

Reaping Day is an annual tradition in the futuristic, dystopian country of Panem (what was once the United States). Panem is a totalitarian country that is divided into thirteen Districts and is ruled over by the Capitol. Every year, as punishment dictated by the Capitol for a failed rebellion, the districts are required to send two child tributes—one male, one female—to fight in a battle (called the "Hunger Games") to the death to win food for their district. Katniss, a resident of small, impoverished, and overlooked District 12, and all other children, aged twelve to eighteen, are required to participate in the Reaping, the process by which Tributes are chosen.

On Reaping Day, Katniss, her long-time hunting buddy and friend Gale, and Katniss's sister Prim, attend the ceremony to see whose name is drawn from their District. When twelve-year-old Prim's name is drawn, Katniss volunteers to take her place as Tribute. The male tribute is Peeta Mellark, a classmate of Katniss's.

Peeta and Katniss are given a brief opportunity to say goodbye to their families and friends before they are ushered onto a train that will take them to the Capitol to prepare and train for the Hunger Games. They are introduced to their mentor, Haymitch, a District 12 winner of the games. The mentor's job is to help Tributes train as well as work with sponsors during the Games. Sponsors provide life-saving supplies to the tributes throughout the duration of the Games.

Upon arriving in the Capitol, Katniss is introduced to Cinna, her stylist. Cinna soon becomes Katniss's friend and encourager as he helps her prepare for the Games. After several days of training and public events, Katniss and Peeta become known as the tributes to beat.

During the Games, Katniss allies with Rue, a Tribute from District 11, until Rue is killed. As the Games continue, Katniss seeks out and saves Peeta from dying. Soon, few Tributes are left and the Capitol announces that if both Tributes from the District are the last remaining Tributes, they can both win. Peeta and Katniss devise a plan to defeat the remaining Tributes and win the Hunger Games.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some similarities and differences of our culture versus the society of Panem (the thirteen Districts and the Capitol)? How varied are the differences between the living situations in the Districts versus the Capitol (i.e. housing, food, transportation, cleanliness)? Do we see these same differences in our world today? What, if anything, can we do about the differences? (James 1:27)
2. Katniss and Gale break several rules (hunting outside District 12, selling their hunt illegally) in order to provide for their families. Is it ever acceptable to break laws set by those in authority? In what circumstances? What does the Bible say in response to this? (John 14:15)
3. The Capitol is a society that thrives on fashion, fancy food and instant gratification. How is this viewed by Katniss and Peeta? What does this say about the members of the Capitol's "priorities"? How does this attitude play into the Capitol's fascination with the Games? How do these issues of vanity, instant gratification and entertainment for the sake of others affect us today? How do we, as Christians, respond and react to these issues? (1 Peter 3:3-4, Psalm 130:4-6)
4. Each of the Tributes in the Games has certain abilities that others do not have (e.g. Katniss with the bow and arrow; Peeta's strength and painting). Though this is an extreme example of using our gifts, how can the Hunger Games help us to recognize and use our gifts? On the first day of training for the Games, Peeta identifies Katniss as a superior hunter even though she down plays her abilities to their mentor Haymitch. What gifts do you see yourself as having? What gifts do others see in you? (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8)
5. In order to survive the arena, the Tributes must kill each other to win the game, and in turn, food for their District. Does this justify their actions? Is there such a thing as a "just" reason for killing another? Can you think of examples in the world today where there are people justify killing for the "right cause" (example: Joseph Kony, Al Qaeda, Adolf Hitler)? (Exodus 20:13, Matthew 5:21-25)

6. The games are an annual source of entertainment for the citizens of the Capitol (much like the Superbowl). However, there seems to be a disconnect for them between the entertainment value (i.e. watching on TV, betting, sponsoring) and the realities of the deaths of children/teenagers. Are there any disconnects in our world today? Has media (internet, video games, TV) desensitized our society? How do we become more aware of the areas in which we have been desensitized? How do we move from awareness to change? Are there biblical examples that we can draw from? (Matthew 5:1-14, 38-48, James 2: 14-26)

7. Before the Games begin, Peeta confesses that he wants to stay true to who he is throughout the Games. He says, "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not" (p. 141). This theme comes to Katniss in the Arena as she watches Rue die. She remains true to herself and her District's traditions regardless of what those in the Capitol think. How do you remain true to your identity? Is it difficult to do so when the outside world forces its views/ideas/ideals upon you? (Philippians 2:5-11)

8. Katniss volunteers to take the place of her sister, Prim, as tribute. She also risks her life several times during the game to save Rue and Peeta. She also signs up for the "tesserae," (oil, grain provided by the Capitol in exchange for an additional chance at being picked for the games) so that her family doesn't starve. Peeta sacrifices his personal safety by aligning with the "careers" so that Katniss has a chance to win. How important is sacrifice in District 12? In the Capitol? In the arena? What can Katniss' and Peeta's sacrifices teach us? (Romans 5:6-20)

Other Resources of Note:

- "Let the Hunger Games Begin" by Allyce Gilligan <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/film/features/28682-let-the-hunger-games-begin>
- "Hungry for the Hunger Games: Why We Need Dystopian Tales" by Monica Selby http://blog.christianitytoday.com/women/2012/03/hungry_for_the_hunger_games_wh.html
- "Hungry?: A PULSE Bible Study" by Mark Sengele, CPH [http://www.cph.org/p-20658-pulse-103-hungry-downloadable.aspx?SearchTerm=hunger games](http://www.cph.org/p-20658-pulse-103-hungry-downloadable.aspx?SearchTerm=hunger+games)
- The LCMS "View from Here" by Rev Philip B Wolf <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1257>