

The Hunger Games

by Suzanne Collins

About the Book

The acclaimed author of the "New York Times"-bestselling Underland Chronicles series delivers equal parts suspense and philosophy, adventure and romance, in a stunning novel set in a future with unsettling parallels to the present.

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one girl and one boy between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. But Katniss has also resolved to outwit the creators of the games. To do that she will have to be the last person standing at the end of the deadly ordeal, and that will take every ounce of strength and cunning she has.

Courtesy of Scholastic

Praise for the Book

"Populated by three dimensional characters, this is a superb tale of physical adventure, political suspense, and romance."

—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

"[The Hunger Games] is a violent, jarring, speed-rap of a novel that generates nearly constant suspense...I couldn't stop reading."

—*Stephen King, Entertainment Weekly Review*

"Impressive world-building, breathtaking action and clear philosophical concerns make this volume, the beginning of a planned trilogy, as good as *The Giver* and more exciting."

—*Kirkus*

"The Hunger Games is as close to perfect an adventure novel as I've ever read. I could not put it down. Collins has transformed the ancient Labyrinth myth into a terrifyingly believable tale of future America. Readers will be hungry for more.

—*Rick Riordan, author of The Percy Jackson Series and The 39 Clues*

Courtesy of Suzanne Collins's website: <http://www.suzannecollinsbooks.com/>

About the Author

Title: Suzanne Collins

American Children's writer (1964 -)

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Personal Information:

Born in NJ; father in the Air Force; married; husband's name Cap. Memberships: Authors Guild.
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Career:

Novelist and television scriptwriter. Television writer, beginning 1991. Worked previously as a clinical director of services for adults with learning disabilities, Cambridge Health Authority.

Awards:

New York Public Library 100 Books for Reading and Sharing selection, 2003, for *Gregor the Overlander*; Cybils Award for Young Adult Fantasy & Science Fiction, 2008-09, *New York Times* Notable Book of 2008 citation, *Horn Book* Fanfare Book citation, 2008, *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 2008 citation, *School Library Journal* Best Book of 2008 citation, *Booklist* Editors' Choice citation, 2008, *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice citation, 2008, and *Kirkus* Best Book of 2008 citation, all for *The Hunger Games*.

Works:

Writings:

"Underland Chronicles"; Middle-Grade Novels

- *Gregor the Overlander*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Gregor and the Code of Claw*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 2007.

"Hunger Games" Series; Young Adult Novels

- *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Catching Fire*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Mockingjay*, Scholastic Press (New York, NY), 2010.

Television

- "A Little Romance," *Clarissa Explains It All*, Nickelodeon, 1993.
- "Blind Date," *Clarissa Explains It All*, Nickelodeon, 1993.
- "The Smoke Screen Case," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1997.
- "The Hit and Run Case," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1997.
- "The Alligator Mystery," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1997.
- "The Seminole Mystery," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1997.
- "The Egg Mystery," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1998.
- "The Spare Parts Mystery," *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, Nickelodeon, 1998.
- (With Peter Bakalian) *Santa Baby!*, Rankin/Bass, 2001.
- "Wubbzy the Hero!/The Nasty Nose," *Wow Wow Wubbzy*, Nick Jr., 2008.
- "Bye-Bye Birdies/Call of the Mild," *Wow Wow Wubbzy*, Nick Jr., 2008.
- "A Great and Grumpy Holiday/The Super Special Gift," *Wow Wow Wubbzy*, Nick Jr., 2008.
- "Big Bunny Blues/The Flower Day Parade," *Wow Wow Wubbzy*, Nick Jr., 2009.
- "Bye Bye Wuzzleburg/Wubbzy's Wacky Journey," *Wow Wow Wubbzy*, Nick Jr., 2009.

Also author of numerous scripts for television programs, including *Little Bear*, *Oswald*, *Clifford's Puppy Days*, and *Generation O!* Story editor, *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, and *Generation O!*

Other

- *When Charlie McButton Lost Power* (picture book), illustrated by Mike Lester, Putnam (New York, NY), 2005.
- *12* (novel), Feiwel and Friends (New York, NY), 2009.

Media Adaptations:

Dan Yaccarino's picture book, *Oswald's Camping Trip*, was based on Collins's script for the *Oswald* television program. The "Underland Chronicles" were adapted as audiobooks. Lionsgate has obtained the film rights to *The Hunger Games*, and is developing the project.

Sidelights

Suzanne Collins, who has worked as a writer on such television programs as *Clarissa Explains It All*, *Little Bear*, and *Oswald*, did not plan to write a novel for children. After a conversation with children's book author and illustrator Joe Proimos, however, she was convinced to give it a try. The resulting novel, *Gregor the Overlander*, became the first installment in Collins's "Underland Chronicles," a series of *Alice in Wonderland*-esque tales that find Gregor traversing an urban environment. Collins, who lived in New York City for sixteen years, wanted to gear her fantasy toward cosmopolitan young readers who are more familiar with city streets than sunlit meadows. As a contributor to the Scholastic Web site noted of Collins's inspiration, "in New York City, you're much more likely to fall down a manhole than a rabbit hole and, if you do, you're not going to find a tea party."

Gregor's adventures begin in *Gregor the Overlander* when he follows his two-year-old sister, Boots, through an air duct and into the world below. What he finds in the Underland is not only a hidden human society, but also giant-sized rats, cockroaches, and spiders that are able to communicate in the humans' language. When Gregor arrives, the Underland is on the brink of war--a war that threatens to spread into the Overland, first to Manhattan and then throughout the world. Gregor's first thought is to get home--until he overhears that his father, who has gone missing, may now be in the Underland and need his son's help. Gregor makes new friends in the giant rat Ripred, Temp the cockroach, and Luxa, a mysterious human girl, and together they search for the missing man and put Gregor on track to his destiny.

As Collins told Jen Rees in an interview posted on Collins's home page, she selected the Underland setting because "I liked the fact that this world was teeming under New York City and nobody was aware of it. That you could be going along preoccupied with your own problems and then whoosh! You take a wrong turn in your laundry room and suddenly a giant cockroach is right in your face. No magic, no space or time travel, there's just a ticket to another world behind your clothes dryer." She "creates a fascinating, vivid, highly original world and a superb story to go along with it," wrote Ed Sullivan in a *Booklist* review of *Gregor the Overlander*, while a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor described Collins's story line as a "luminous, supremely absorbing quest." Steven Engelfried, writing in *School Library Journal*, wrote that the story's "plot threads unwind smoothly, and the pace of the book is just right."

As the "Underland Chronicles" series continues, Gregor fulfills a prophecy and becomes a leader in the Underland. Together with his companions Ripred, Temp, and Luxa, in *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, Gregor continues his adventures, undertaking to rescue a kidnap victim named Boots. In her sequel, Collins once again showcases her "careful attention to detail, pacing, and character development," in the opinion of *Horn Book* reviewer Kitty Flynn, and Sullivan dubbed the novel's protagonist "courageous, selfless, and ultimately triumphant." In the third book of the series, *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, Gregor's enemy is not an army, but a plague, one that his mother contracts. "Collins maintains the momentum, charm, and vivid settings of the original title," wrote Tasha Saecker her *School Library Journal* review of this title. *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods* "delivers the breakneck adventure and strong characters readers have come to expect," wrote a contributor to *Kirkus Reviews*, and Flynn

concluded that, with this third series installment, "character development, plotting, pacing, and description all shine."

Gregor returns in *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, which finds some of the humans' allies in trouble. Together with Gregor, Luxa and Temp attempt to save the day, and "the breathless pace, intense drama, and extraordinary challenges" of their quest "will leave fans clamoring" for more, according to *School Library Journal* reviewer Mara Alpert. In *Horn Book*, Flynn commented that "vivid description, expert pacing, and subtle character development all enhance" Collins's fourth "gripping fantasy adventure."

"As the series continues," Collins explained in an interview published on her home page, "Gregor is faced with increasingly difficult quests and choices as the Underland breaks into a massive global war. His struggle to survive--both physically and spiritually--forms the arc of the 'Underland Chronicles.'" Gregor's struggles conclude in *Gregor and the Code of Claw*, in which the hero has to confront the originator of the war in the Underland: the evil white rat Bane. The prophecy that calls for Gregor to face off against Bane also predicts his death at the moment of his triumph. "Friends and foes from the previous volumes reappear here," wrote Beth L. Meister in *School Library Journal*, "and Gregor's self-doubts and changing relationship with Luxa add to his depth." The author "delivers more of what's made this series so compelling: vivid action scenes, detailed military machinations, and nuanced character development," stated Claire Rossiter in *Kliatt*. "The resolution is bittersweet but faintly hopeful--a fitting end for an unflinchingly gutsy series," declared a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor. "There is plenty of action, adventure and character growth for everyone," concluded a *Rave Reviews Log: Fantasy Web* site reviewer. "Thumbs up for the whole series."

Along with her "Underland Chronicles," Collins has produced a picture-book text featuring illustrations by Mike Lester. In the rhyming text of *When Charlie McButton Lost Power*, Charlie spends most of his time playing video games, but must find a new way to entertain himself when his home's power goes out. A contributor to *Children's Bookwatch* called Collins's tale "refreshingly original and moving."

"Suzanne is breaking new ground with the 'Hunger Games' trilogy," wrote a contributor to the *Scholastic* Web site. "Poignant and rich with edge-of-your-seat pacing, this series is set in a district that evolved from the ruins of what was once known as North America." The first novel, *The Hunger Games*, "begins long after the human population has been decimated by climate change and the wars that followed. Now North America is the nation of Panem, a country with twelve fenced-in districts that all work to feed the enormously wealthy and technologically advanced capital," declared John Green in the *New York Times Book Review*. "Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen lives in District Twelve, the poorest of them all. Her father died mining in the Seam years ago, and now her family survives thanks to her mother's knowledge of herbal medicine and Katniss's own illegal hunting and gathering outside the district's fence." The Hunger Games were established by that elite years ago, after a thirteenth district tried to rebel against the capital's overlords; their district was disbanded, and all its inhabitants were hunted down and killed. To keep the fate of District Thirteen in the minds of the other residents, the overlords decreed that the districts should annually send two dozen boys and girls (known as

"tributes") to the capital to fight to the death until only one survivor is left. "When the Games begin, the tributes enter a kind of virtual game preserve," explained a Eugene, Oregon, *Register-Guard* reviewer, "controlled by the Capitol to maximize the dual goals of entertaining its citizens while keeping the districts in fear." Together with Peeta, a boy from her district, Katniss begins the long, hard, ruthless struggle for success in the Games.

The Hunger Games was "very much based on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, which I read when I was eight years old," Collins told Rick Margolis in an interview for *School Library Journal*. "I was a huge fan of Greek and Roman mythology. As punishment for displeasing Crete, Athens periodically had to send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete, where they were thrown into the labyrinth and devoured by the Minotaur." Collins also found inspiration in the historical story of the Greek gladiator Spartacus, which was turned into a famous movie in 1960 starring Kirk Douglas. "Because Spartacus was a slave," Collins said in an interview for the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, "he was never the direct subject of Roman writers, but his general story can be found in Plutarch's work, *The Life of Crassus*. I researched not only the historical Spartacus and the popular media about him, but many of the historical gladiators from pre-Christian times (before Rome started throwing Christians to the lions), and I found three things always present in the gladiator paradigm: (1) a ruthless government that (2) forces people to fight to the death and (3) uses these fights to the death as a form of popular entertainment." "Collins's story is one part reality television show, one part classical Greek hero story, and one part romance," explained James Blasingame in a review for the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. "Readers around the world are raving about how engaging this story is and how they raced through the book to find out what would happen next. There are heartwarming, gut wrenching, and even comical moments in the book, and both Peeta and Katniss are sympathetic characters from the start."

In *Catching Fire*, the sequel, Katniss has to confront the ambivalence of her feelings for Peeta and the consequences of her act of rebellion in the Hunger Games--an act that has angered the overlords of the capital, but which won the popular support that helped overrule the powers-that-be. The co-winners of the Games "must keep up the pretense of being madly in love to protect themselves and their loved ones from the government's retaliation," wrote a reviewer for *Blogging for a Good Book* Web site. "While on their victory tour, Katniss and Peeta visit every district in Panem, and find that in some places there is an undercurrent of dissent among the population." Slowly Katniss's act of rebellion is being turned into a symbol of revolution. "In all, *Catching Fire* is a heart-pounding, thrilling read that manages to pass its predecessor in terms of its depth of themes, its increased worldbuilding scope, and its strong characters," concluded a reviewer for *Book Smugglers*. "I absolutely loved it--and this is easily one of my favorite reads of 2009. The only drawback? Having to wait another year for the final volume of this stunning series."

Further Readings About the Author:

Periodicals

- *America's Intelligence Wire*, March 17, 2009, "Lionsgate Feasts on *The Hunger Games*."
- *Booklist*, November 15, 2003, Ed Sullivan, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 608; September 1, 2004, Ed Sullivan, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 120; July, 2005, Ed Sullivan, review of *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, p. 1924; September 1, 2008, Francisca Goldsmith, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 97; July 1, 2009, Ian Chipman, review of *Catching Fire*, p. 62.
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, January, 2004, Janice Del Negro, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 185; October, 2004, Timnah Card, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 65; September, 2005, Timnah Card, review of *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, p. 11.
- *Children's Bookwatch*, June, 2005, review of *When Charlie McButton Lost Power*.
- *Christian Century*, December 16, 2008, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 27.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, September 12, 2008, Stephen King, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 139; September 4, 2009, Jennifer Reese, review of *Catching Fire*, p. 63.
- *Hollywood Reporter*, March 18, 2009, "Lionsgate Strikes on 'Hunger,'" p. 3.
- *Horn Book*, September-October, 2003, Kitty Flynn, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 609; September-October, 2004, Kitty Flynn, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 578; July-August, 2005, Kitty Flynn, review of *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, p. 467; July-August, 2006, Kitty Flynn, review of *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, p. 437; July 1, 2007, Kitty Flynn, review of *Gregor and the Code of Claw*; January 1, 2009, review of *The Hunger Games*.
- *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, May 1, 2009, James Blasingame, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 724.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, August 1, 2003, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 1014; December 1, 2003, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 1402; August 1, 2004, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 739; May 1, 2005, review of *When Charlie McButton Lost Power*, p. 536; June 15, 2005, review of *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, p. 680; May 15, 2006, review of *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, p. 515; May 1, 2007, review of *Gregor and the Code of Claw*; September 1, 2008, review of *The Hunger Games*.
- *Kliatt*, November 1, 2008, Claire Rosser, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 8.
- *New York Times Book Review*, November 9, 2008, "Scary New World," p. 30.
- *Publishers Weekly*, September 8, 2003, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 77; June 9, 2008, "A Dark Horse Breaks Out: The Buzz Is on for Suzanne Collins's YA Series Debut," p. 19; November 3, 2008, Megan Whalen Turner, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 58; June 22, 2009, "Fanning the Flames," p. 46.
- *Register-Guard*, January 26, 2009, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 12.
- *Sacramento Bee*, September 2, 2009, "'Catching Fire' Relights the Thrills of 'Games,'" p. 726.
- *School Library Journal*, November, 2003, Steven Engelfried, review of *Gregor the Overlander*, p. 134; October, 2004, Beth Meister, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of*

- Bane*, p. 160; July, 2005, Tasha Saecker, review of *Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*, p. 100; July, 2005, Barbara Auerbach, review of *When Charlie McButton Lost Power*, p. 71; September, 2006, Mara Alpert, review of *Gregor and the Marks of Secret*, p. 202; July 1, 2007, Beth L. Meister, review of *Gregor and the Code of Claw*, p. 99; September 1, 2008, Jane Henriksen Baird, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 176; September 1, 2008, Rick Margolis, "A Killer Story: Suzanne Collins's 'The Hunger Games' Has Plenty of Blood, Guts, and Heart," p. 30; October 1, 2008, review of *The Hunger Games*, p. 71; June 1, 2009, "Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games*," p. 56.
- *Time*, September 7, 2009, Lev Grossman, "Catching Fire: Suzanne Collins' Hit Young-Adult Novels."
 - *Voice of Youth Advocates*, April, 2004, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 21; December, 2004, review of *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*, p. 402.

Online

- *At Home with Books*, <http://athomewithbooks.blogspot.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *The Hunger Games*.
- *Blogging for a Good Book*, <http://bfgb.wordpress.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *Catching Fire*.
- *Book Smugglers*, <http://thebooksmugglers.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *Catching Fire*.
- *Compulsive Reader*, <http://thecompulsivereader.blogspot.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *Catching Fire*.
- *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/> (October 13, 2009), author profile.
- *Medieval Bookworm*, <http://chikune.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *The Hunger Games*.
- *Rave Reviews Log: Fantasy*, <http://ravefantasy.blogspot.com/> (October 13, 2009), review of *Gregor and the Code of Claw*.
- *Scholastic Web site*, <http://www.scholastic.com/> (October 13, 2009), "Suzanne Collins."
- *Suzanne Collins Home Page*, <http://suzannecollinsbooks.com> (October 13, 2009).*

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Author Interview

A Conversation: Questions and Answers

Suzanne Collins Author of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

Courtesy of Scholastic

Q: You have said from the start that *The Hunger Games* story was intended as a trilogy. Did it actually end the way you planned it from the beginning?

A: Very much so. While I didn't know every detail, of course, the arc of the story from gladiator game, to revolution, to war, to the eventual outcome remained constant throughout the writing process.

Q: We understand you worked on the initial screenplay for a film to be based on *The Hunger Games*. What is the biggest difference between writing a novel and writing a screenplay?

A: There were several significant differences. Time, for starters. When you're adapting a novel into a two-hour movie you can't take everything with you. The story has to be condensed to fit the new form. Then there's the question of how best to take a book told in the first person and present tense and transform it into a satisfying dramatic experience. In the novel, you never leave Katniss for a second and are privy to all of her thoughts so you need a way to dramatize her inner world and to make it possible for other characters to exist outside of her company. Finally, there's the challenge of how to present the violence while still maintaining a PG-13 rating so that your core audience can view it. A lot of things are acceptable on a page that wouldn't be on a screen. But how certain moments are depicted will ultimately be in the director's hands.

Q: Are you able to consider future projects while working on *The Hunger Games*, or are you immersed in the world you are currently creating so fully that it is too difficult to think about new ideas?

A: I have a few seeds of ideas floating around in my head but—given that much of my focus is still on *The Hunger Games*—it will probably be awhile before one fully emerges and I can begin to develop it.

Q: *The Hunger Games* is an annual televised event in which one boy and one girl from each of the twelve districts is forced to participate in a fight-to-the-death on live TV. What do you think the appeal of reality television is—to both kids and adults?

A: Well, they're often set up as games and, like sporting events, there's an interest in seeing who wins. The contestants are usually unknown, which makes them relatable. Sometimes they have very talented people performing.

Then there's the voyeuristic thrill—watching people being humiliated, or brought to tears, or suffering physically—which I find very disturbing. There's also the potential for desensitizing the audience, so that when they see real tragedy playing out on, say, the news, it doesn't have the impact it should.

Q: If you were forced to compete in the Hunger Games, what do you think your special skill would be?

A: Hiding. I'd be scaling those trees like Katniss and Rue. Since I was trained in sword-fighting, I guess my best hope would be to get hold of a rapier if there was one available. But the truth is I'd probably get about a four in Training.

Q: You weave action, adventure, mythology, sci-fi, romance, and philosophy throughout The Hunger Games. What influenced the creation of The Hunger Games?

A: A significant influence would have to be the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The myth tells 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 kid, I could appreciate how ruthless this was. Crete was sending a very clear message: "Mess with us and we'll do something worse than kill you. We'll kill your children." And the thing is, it was allowed; the parents sat by powerless to stop it. Theseus, who was the son of the king, volunteered to go. I guess in her own way, Katniss is a futuristic Theseus.

In keeping with the classical roots, I send my tributes into an updated version of the Roman gladiator games, which entails a ruthless government forcing people to fight to the death as popular entertainment. The world of Panem, particularly the Capitol, is loaded with Roman references. Panem itself comes from the expression "Panem et Circenses" which translates into "Bread and Circuses."

The audiences for both the Roman games and reality TV are almost characters in themselves. They can respond with great enthusiasm or play a role in your elimination.

I was channel surfing between reality TV programming and actual war coverage when Katniss's story came to me. One night I'm sitting there flipping around and on one channel there's a group of young people competing for, I don't know, money maybe? And on the next, there's a group of young people fighting an actual war. And I was tired, and the lines began to blur in this very unsettling way, and I thought of this story.

Q: The trilogy's premise is very brutal, yet is handled so tastefully. Was this a difficult balance to achieve?

A: Yes, the death scenes are always hard to write. It's difficult to put kids in violent situations—Gregor (the protagonist in *The Underland Chronicles*) is in a war, Katniss is in a gladiator game. Characters will die. It's not fun to write, but I think if you can't commit to really doing the idea, it's probably better to work on another type of story.

Given that, you have to remember who you're trying to reach with the book. I try and think of how I would tell a particularly difficult event to my own children. Exactly what details they need to know to really understand it, and what would be gratuitous.

Q: *The Hunger Games* tackles issues like severe poverty, starvation, oppression, and the effects of war among others. What drew you to such serious subject matter?

A: That was probably my dad's influence. He was career Air Force, a military specialist, a historian, and a doctor of political science. When I was a kid, he was gone for a year in Viet Nam. It was very important to him that we understood about certain aspects of life. So, it wasn't enough to visit a battlefield, we needed to know why the battle occurred, how it played out, and the consequences. Fortunately, he had a gift for presenting history as a fascinating story. He also seemed to have a good sense of exactly how much a child could handle, which is quite a bit.

Q: What do you hope readers will come away with when they read *The Hunger Games*?

A: Questions about how elements of the book might be relevant in their own lives. And, if they're disturbing, what they might do about them.

Q: In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Gale have an extensive knowledge of hunting, foraging, wildlife, and survival techniques. What kinds of research did you do, if any?

A: Some things I knew from listening to my dad talking about his childhood. He grew up during the Depression. For his family, hunting was not a sport but a way to put meat on the table. He also knew a certain amount about edible plants. He'd go into the woods and gather all these wild mushrooms and bring them home and sauté them. My mom wouldn't let any of us go near them! But he'd eat them up and they never harmed him, so I guess he knew which ones were safe, because wild mushrooms can be very deadly.

I also read a big stack of wilderness survival guidebooks. And here's what I learned: you've got to be really good to survive out there for more than a few days.

Q: How long would it take for North America to deteriorate into the world depicted in the books?

A: You'd have to allow for the collapse of civilization as we know it, the emergence of Panem, a rebellion, and seventy-four years of the Hunger Games. We're talking triple digits.

Q: You have written for television for young children and for middle-grade readers (the *New York Times* bestselling series *The Underland Chronicles*). Why did you decide to write for an older audience and how was the experience different?

A: I think the nature of the story dictated the age of the audience from the beginning. Both *The Underland Chronicles* and *The Hunger Games* have a lot of violence. But in *The Underland Chronicles*, even though human characters die, a lot of the conflict takes place between different fantastical species. Giant rats and bats and things. You can skew a little younger that way. Whereas in *The Hunger Games*, there's no fantasy element, it's futuristic sci-fi and the violence is not only human on human, it's kid on kid. And I think that automatically moves you into an older age range.

I find there isn't a great deal of difference technically in how you approach a story, no matter what age it's for. I started out as a playwright for adult audiences. When television work came along, it was primarily for children. But whatever age you're writing for, the same rules of plot, character, and theme apply. You just set up a world and try to remain true to it. If it's filled with cuddly animated animals, chances are no one's going to die. If it's filled with giant flesh-and-blood rats with a grudge, there's going to be violence.

Q: What was it like to return to the world of the *Hunger Games* to write *Catching Fire* and then *Mockingjay*?

A: Honestly, I feel like I never left it. The revisions of Book I overlapped with the writing of Book II, just as Book II has overlapped with Book III. Since each book feeds into the next, I feel like part of my brain's been in Panem continuously.

Q: Do you have every book completely mapped out, or do you have a general idea and then take it from there? Did you run into things that were unexpected plot-wise or character-wise?

A: I've learned it helps me to work out the key structural points before I begin a story. The inciting incident, acts, breaks, mid-story reversal, crisis, climax, those sorts of things. I'll know a lot of what fills the spaces between them as well, but I leave some uncharted room for the characters to develop. And if a door opens along the way, and I'm intrigued by where it leads, I'll definitely go through it.

Q: How do you typically spend your workday? Do you have a routine as you write?

A: I grab some cereal and sit down to work as soon as possible. The more distractions I have to deal with before I actually begin writing, the harder focusing on the story becomes. Then I work until I'm tapped out, usually sometime in the early afternoon. If I actually write three to five hours, that's a productive day. Some days all I do is stare at the wall. That can be productive, too, if you're working out character and plot problems. The rest of the time, I walk around with the story slipping in and out of my thoughts.

Q: You are probably getting a lot of fan mail! What is the most surprising feedback you've received for *The Hunger Games*? (Or, what has surprised you the most about the feedback you're getting for *The Hunger Games*.)

A: Probably how differently people view the book. Some are attracted to the dystopian world, others are there for action and adventure, still others for the romance. The readers are defining the book in very personal and exciting ways.

Q: What were some of your favorite novels when you were a teen?

A: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith
The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers
Nineteen Eighty Four by George Orwell
Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy
Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut
A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
Boris by Jaapter Haar
Germinal by Emile Zola
Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury

Courtesy Scholastic

Discussion Questions

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?

Courtesy Reading Group Guides