

# The World of The Hunger Games

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i  
književnosti

Barbara Frey

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Završni rad

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Osijek, 2016.

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Humanističke znanosti, filologija, teorija i povijest književnosti

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## **Abstract**

*The Hunger Games* is a novel written by Suzanne Collins and published in 2008. The novel belongs to a trilogy with the same name *The Hunger Games* and due to its sudden popularity, based on the unusual setting, the names of the characters, the horrific theme and the frightening metaphorical similarity to today's entertainment, all three novels have been adapted into movies in the past 5 years. This paper will focus on the unusual dystopian world of Panem by exploring some of twelve Districts and their civilians who either live a hard and frightening life or a rich and relatively comforting life. It will also examine the history and the stream of events that have led to the annual Hunger Games where they pick children to fight to death to entertain viewers. This paper will also analyze where the idea for the novel came from and compare the similarities and differences between the novel and Roman mythology.

**Keywords:** *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins, Katniss Everdeen, Panem, food, death.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>1. The Dystopian World</b> .....	6
<b>2. Origin and Mythology</b> .....	9
<b>3. Geography</b> .....	11
<b>3.1. District 12</b> .....	12
<b>4. History</b> .....	14
<b>5. Politics</b> .....	15
<b>6. The Hunger Games</b> .....	17
<b>7. Symbols</b> .....	22
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	24
<b>Work Cited</b> .....	25

## Introduction

“Panem et circenses” is a Latin phrase meaning “bread and circuses” and can be used to clearly describe, in short, what this dystopian novel, *The Hunger Games*, is really about. Created by Suzanne Collins, this first novel of three covers a story that on the surface is nothing like our world as it is a science fiction theme novel. However, the through analysis of the novel reveals that it is actually very relatable to our world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper will attempt to find the origins of the story and of the country of Panem, it will try to understand the mythological background of the story, and in what ways this novel is a dystopian novel. The politics, geography and history of the newly introduced world will also be explored, along with the analysis of the rules of the most popular event that happens every year in Panem – the Hunger Games. Before drawing conclusions in the last chapter of the paper, the symbols found in the novel will be analyzed to find out their meaning and role in the story.

# 1. The Dystopian World

The novel *The Hunger Games* falls into the category of science fiction. Science fiction novels usually talk about made up or futuristic settings, futuristic technology, parallel worlds, space topics, and sometimes these novels have supernatural elements as well. However, in her text “The Hunger Games: Literature, Literacy, and Online Affinity Spaces,” Jen Scott Curwood states that “science fiction includes subgenres such as cyberpunk, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian fiction, and it’s related to other genres like fantasy and speculative fiction” (418). *The Hunger Games* is not only set in a futuristic world with futuristic technology but it is also set in a dystopian world characterized by dictatorship and the Hunger Games where children kill each other. A dystopia is the exact opposite of the term utopia which stands for a peaceful, beautiful and idyllic world. As an opposite to earlier fictional utopias (depictions of idealized societies that promise a glorious future), dystopian fiction instead satirizes utopian ideals or describes societies where negative social forces have supremacy (Scholes and Ostenson 11). Also, “dystopias are characterized as a society that is a counter-utopia, a repressed, controlled, restricted system with multiple social controls put into place via government, military, or a powerful authority figure. Issues of surveillance and invasive technologies are often key” (Spisak 55). This further defines dystopia in terms of a bad, horrible world, a world with a society that is frightened and unhappy. However, Justin Scholes and Jon Ostenson in their text “Understanding the Appeal of Dystopian Young Adult Fiction” agree with the fact that “whatever has run ‘amok’—government, technology, commercialization— society as a whole is to blame because of incompetence, consent, or complacency” (11). The concept of dystopia arose in the 20th century in response to such world events as the First World War (Scholes and Ostenson 11), yet “the recent explosion in dystopian literature for young adults” (Scholes and Ostenson 12) is interesting “because these new titles include similar themes and conventions as classic works in this genre. Recent titles, though, are aimed squarely at a new audience (teens) and are enjoying strong success” (Scholes and Ostenson 12).

Some common elements that can be found in a dystopian novel, as well as in the novel *The Hunger Games*, are: “a setting so vividly and clearly described that it becomes almost a character in itself; individuals or forces in charge who have a legitimate reason for being as they are;

protagonists who are shaped by their environment and situations; and a conclusion that reflects the almost always dire circumstances” (Spisak 56). In addition, in her text “Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics,” Terri Chung states that further characteristics of a dystopian world are:

propaganda is used to control the citizens of society, information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted, a figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society, citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance, citizens have a fear of the outside world, citizens live in a dehumanized state, the natural world is banished and distrusted, citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad, and the society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

Other elements, including themes and motifs, common in a dystopian novel as well as in the novel *The Hunger Games* are: politics, society and class, identity, violence, nature, technology, war, love, survival, fight, death, victory, wealth, entertainment, appearance (beauty), power, versions of reality, competition, sacrifice, etc. Rubyn E. Howell further expands the list of dystopian elements in YA literature: “a society worse than in which the reader resides in real life” (17), “encroachment of civil rights and attacks on creature comforts” (17); “consumerism and thinking as a ‘herd’ rather than as individuals” (17-18). Moreover, “the mood of the dystopian YA genre can be grim, but the general idea is the triumph over the direst circumstances” (Howell 18); in addition, “the violence within these novels is stunning. The idea of the ‘happy ending’ in the dystopian novel is skewed or subjective” (Howell 18).

Dystopian fiction features protagonists who question the underlying values of a flawed society and their identity within it—who they are going to be and how they are going to act (Scholes and Ostenson 14). Katniss Everdeen is what a dystopian protagonist should be: “highly intelligent and resourceful, and often full of moxie” (Howell 18) offering “a fresh teen protagonist perspective and promot[ing] the idea of survival at any cost” (Howell 18). Furthermore, a protagonist “questions the existing social and political systems, believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives, helps the audience recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective” (Chung). As Katniss did in the novel, “protagonists....come to recognize the truth about the societies they live in, they often feel alone, separated from family and friends who do not share the same realizations. As a result, one of the conflicts they face is deciding whom they can trust with their understandings of their society’s



flaws and with their plans to take corrective action” (Scholes and Ostenson 15). In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss was not alone, basically everyone around her knew that life should have to be this way; they knew that the Games are a way to degrade them as a society, to punish them – “look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen” (Collins 19); this was not a secret as the President repeated this. However, Katniss was alone in her decision to do something about it, to take action from the very start of the novel. She showed dissatisfaction with the Capitol and determination to do something from the very moment a reader is introduced to her: “when I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called the Capitol” (Collins 7), but she knew that she could not stop them alone. However, she did make a spark when she forced the Gamemaker proclaim two victors instead of one: “the frantic voice of Claudius Templesmith shouts above them. ‘Stop! Stop! Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to present the victors of the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark! I give you — the tributes of District Twelve!’” (Collins 339). All in all, “whatever the backdrop of the dystopia—a violent society, a tyrannical government, an over-commercialized world—the protagonists come to understand that their society has become inhumane” (Scholes and Ostenson 14) and this is what “pushes the protagonists to action” (Scholes and Ostenson 15).

Another important element/character of dystopian science fiction is a villain. A bad guy with no depth, vulnerability, history, or context functions as a foil for the protagonist but adds little else to the story. The depth of character makes the struggle between good and evil (against an individual or society) far more vivid. In *The Hunger Games*, Snow is one of many worthy villains; interestingly, he is perhaps the more blatantly malign but also slightly more sympathetic villain to emerge from the series. It is clear that he is following in a line of leaders who made similar choices and it is clear that he is an exaggerated representation of the society in which he came to power (Spisak 57).

## 2. Origin and Mythology

As Suzanne Collins was fond of ancient world and mythology, the origin of the novel *The Hunger Games* has a lot to do with it. First and foremost, the main idea of the novel is “a gladiatorial combat to the death, fought by teenagers in a vast technologically controlled Arena” (Thomas 362) “in which the winner is the last one left alive” (Duigon). This definitely reminds readers of the gladiator games that were held in ancient Rome where they had “death as entertainment and a demonstration of power was commonplace in that ancient Romans sent gladiators into the arena to fight until death while lions were loosed to publicly dismember and devour Christians” (Sloan et al 430). In the novel, “the games begin with the very Roman ritual of participants entering a stadium on chariots to the wild applause of the crowd. Like ancient gladiators, the participants are doomed but idolized” (Strauss).

In addition to being influenced by the gladiator games, the story of Katniss Everdeen is highly associated with and originates from “the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur” (Everett 2), which begins with the wife of King Minos of Crete who gives birth to the Minotaur, a half human half bull creature. King Minos was embarrassed by him and sent him to live in a Labyrinth where Minos imprisoned his enemies and the Minotaur ate them because “the labyrinth was such a complicated construction that no one could ever find the way out alive” (Greekmyths-Greekmythology). After the Minotaur killed Queen Pasiphae’s and King Minos’ son, Androgeus, Minos had “Aegeus the king of Athens...send seven men and women every year to the Minotaur to advert the plague caused by the death of Androgeus” (Greekmyths-Greekmythology).

Throughout the novel, there are also references to the ancient Rome, such as the phrase “panem et circenses” “meaning ‘bread and circuses,’ which refers to governmental attempts to appease discontent through the provision of the means of life and recreation” (Parks and Yamashiro 141). The “bread and circuses” consisted of huge handouts of grain to the public and the staging of massive, costly games that could last for weeks and slaughter thousands of animals (human gladiators were more rarely killed than is popularly imagined)” (Murty). Bread was the free corn dole given out to all Rome’s poor by the emperor, while circuses referred to all the chariot races and gladiatorial games paid for by the emperors to keep their people happy and prevent rebellion (Myatt). Translated “bread and circuses,” this phrase can also mean “hunger

games,” which is exactly a title, but it can also be the shortest summary of this novel. The author used the word “panem” as the name of the country the characters live in. Also, as there were a lot of poor people who needed “panem” or “bread” because they were hungry, life in the “districts,” where most of the characters live, is nasty, brutish, and short, No one has enough to eat (Duigon). Yet, they are able to put their names into the choosing bowl each year and “each...is worth a meager year’s supply of grain and oil for one person. You may do this for each of your family members as well” (Collins 14). The names that are pulled out on Reaping day are the chosen ones to go into the “circenses” or “circuses” or into the “games” and fight to death.

Other Roman references appearing in the novel are the characters with unusual Roman-like names such as Cinna, Coriolanus, Caesar, Octavia, Romulus, Seneca, Venia, which are combined with English last names. Many people with those Roman names resemble the people who had them in ancient Rome. For example, Seneca in ancient Rome was a “playwright, politician and tutor to the infamous emperor Nero” (Myatt) and just like Seneca in the novel, in ancient Rome “Nero...forced Seneca to commit suicide” (Myatt). Other examples are President Coriolanus Snow who “is named after the harsh Roman general Coriolanus, who showed utter contempt for the Roman poor” (Myatt). It seems like most negative characters or the ones that support the politics of Panem or live in the Capitol where “life...is lush, hi-tech, and glitzy...The men are disgustingly effete, the women, hideous” (Duigon) were given Roman names. However, the examples like Katniss’ stylist Cinna who was fond of Katniss and showed signs of dissatisfaction with the Panem politics is an exception, as he resembles a “Lucius Cornelius Cinna, who rebelled against two successive Roman dictators” (Myatt) in ancient Rome.

### 3. Geography

The dystopian world of *The Hunger Games* is placed “in a reconstructed post-Apocalyptic North America, Panem” (Thomas 361) or in “a futuristic version of North America, approximately 75 years after a violent civil war. In Panem, citizens are born into...regionally segregated fenced reservations called ‘districts,’ and inhabitants are forced to work assigned tasks or starve” (Sloan et al 428). Panem is divided into 12 districts, along with the “far-off city” (Collins 7) that is the center of Panem, the Capitol, which “was built in a place once called the Rockies” (Collins 42), while “District 12 is pretty much the end of the line. Beyond us, there’s only wilderness. If you don’t count the ruins of District 13” (Collins 83). The 12 districts have no way of mutual communication or any way of visiting each other. The travel between the Districts “is forbidden except for officially sanctioned duties” (Collins 42), the possession of weapons is (but for localized official corruption) forbidden, lest the possession of arms breed rebellion (Thomas 385). The Capitol’s goal is to prevent the citizens from knowing what is happening in each district and to avoid possible dissatisfactions and uprising revolutions. Each district has a job, something they produce and export to the Capitol.

In the novel, we find out that District 1 “makes luxury items for the Capitol” (Collins 69), District 3 makes “televisions and automobiles and explosives” (Collins 216-217), District 4 is known for “fishing” (Collins 66), District 11 is the center of agriculture and District 12 is “the coal district” (Collins 74). The Capitol and some near-by districts live freely and in luxury while most of the other districts suffer and starve. For example, there are tributes in the Games called “Careers” because they came from “the aspirational classes of Divisions 1–4, the ‘Careers,’ who train and volunteer for the glory of competing, abandon any concept of childhood, adopting a Spartan ethos” (Thomas 375). These “are the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment” (Collins 94), while the “children in the poorer Districts surrender whatever childhood they may have to an ever-present threat of selection and death” (Thomas 375). For example, “Katniss’s home district is the poorest of the Districts, dedicated to supplying coal from the ugly and dangerous Seam. There, death through starvation, illness or mine accidents is a constant presence, and public institutions such as education serve only the specialized productive capacity of the District” (Thomas 366). In the past, there used to be a 13<sup>th</sup> district, which “mine graphite... That was part of District 13’s job

until they were destroyed” (Collins 74). They rebelled against the rulers in the Capitol and were bombed to the ground as an example to the others: “If you don’t count the ruins of District 13 that still smolder from the toxic bombs. They show it on television occasionally, just to remind us” (Collins 83).

### **3.1. District 12**

District 12 is the home to the protagonists of the novel *Katniss Everdeen*. It is considered the poorest District of all twelve of them where people have strict rules: “All forms of stealing are forbidden in District 12. Punishable by death” (Collins 30), but poor living conditions: “Electricity in District 12 comes and goes, usually we only have it a few hours a day. Often the evenings are spent in candlelight. The only time you can count on it is when they’re airing the Games or some important government message on television that it’s mandatory to watch” (Collins 80) and most of them starve: “Because at home was my mother with her dead eyes and my little sister, with her hollow cheeks and cracked lips” (Collins 29). As all Districts have a job that sends their resources to the Capitol, District 12 has the industry of coal: “District 12 was in a region known is Appalachia. Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here” (Collins 42), and they send people down to the coal mines to work all day in dangerous conditions. In a lethal explosion, Katniss lost her father. District 12’s mayor is Mayor Undersee and the district is circled by wire to prevent people from escaping into the woods, or something escaping into the District from the woods: “Separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire loops. In theory, it’s supposed to be electrified twenty-four hours a day as a deterrent to the predators that live in the woods — packs of wild dogs, lone cougars, bears — that used to threaten our streets” (Collins 5). The district is divided into smaller neighborhoods, such as The Seam, the merchant part of town, The Hob, Victor’s Village, and The Justice Building. The Seam is the poorest part of District 12 and it is the part of the District where Katniss lives with her family:

Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders,

swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. (Collins 5)

It is also the neighborhood closest to the woods where Katniss goes off to hunt daily; it is also mentioned in the novel that Katniss's mother came to live here with Katniss's father when they got married, but she was originally from a wealthier family that lived "in town" (Collins 84). The Hob is a market where Katniss goes to trade the food she hunts down in the woods, usually squirrels, rabbits, turkey – "The butcher would buy my rabbits but not squirrels. The baker enjoyed squirrel but would only trade for one if his wife wasn't around. The Head Peacekeeper loved wild turkey. The mayor had a passion for strawberries" (Collins 52), even herbs that she sometimes brought home for her mother who was a healer, since doctors were too expensive for them: "Since almost no one can afford doctors, apothecaries are our healers" (Collins 9). The Victors' Village is a part of the District where the Capitol built luxurious houses for the victors of the Hunger Games; in District 12, only one house in the Victor's Village is occupied. The Justice Building is mentioned a few times in the novel as a place where in front of the building they hold the Reaping for the Games: "We all exchange terse nods then focus our attention on the temporary stage that is set up before the Justice Building. It holds three chairs, a podium, and two large glass balls, one for the boys and one for the girls" (Collins 18). There is also the wealthier part of the district where merchants live: "behind the shops that serve the wealthiest townspeople. The merchants live above their businesses, so I was essentially in their backyards" (Collins 30). Katniss mentions that her mother's "...parents were part of the small merchant class that caters to officials, Peacekeepers, and the occasional Seam customer. They ran an apothecary shop in the nicer part of District 12" (Collins 9).

## 4. History

In the novel, Katniss shortly presents the history of Panem:

the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained. The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. (Collins 18-19)

This post-catastrophic “peace and prosperity” state was shattered by an uprising of the Districts (Thomas 363) called “the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth” (Collins 19) “a source of graphite, was reduced to a toxic wasteland and left unreconstructed as a reminder of Capitol’s supremacy” (Thomas 363). It also produced the Treaty of Treason: “the Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games” (Collins 19), “a brutal and brutalizing demonstration of power, instantiated in the Treaty of Treason as a reminder to the Districts of their subjugation to Capitol – a political artefact” (Thomas 366). The Treaty is also a way to degrade and mock the twelve Districts and serves as well “as a punishment and reminder of the failed uprising against the Capitol 74 years ago” (Parks and Yamashiro 138): “this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion” (Collins 19).

## 5. Politics

Even though set on the land that had once been the democratic USA, Panem differs much from its “role model.” Panem, which is a consumer-driven thinly veiled version of the United States, is now a dictatorship and a nightmare vision of our future (Burke 2). The dictatorship now ruling over Panem is so cruel that the citizens do not seem to realize that they are being manipulated or they do but they know that they cannot do anything about it as the first rebellion, the Dark Days, had ended badly. It is also possible that the people of Panem do not notice this horrible politics because the Capitol manages to cover it up and avert the people’s minds from their unfortunate lives. The Capitol controls the districts through the restriction of food. This insidious deprivation is intended to suppress rebellion with physical emaciation, a lack of trust between neighbors, and a heightened fear for their lives (Parks and Yamashiro 138). Their job is to serve the Capitol, despite living and working in poor conditions, despite lacking food – “District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety” (Collins 7), being surrounded by death and wires – “separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops” (Collins 5) to prevent them from going into the wild: “even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties, more people would risk it if they had weapons” (Collins 6).

While most of Panem is kept in line by a lack of resources, the Capitol and surrounding wealthy districts are kept in order through the consumption of ever changing fads, parties and the spectacle of Hunger Game preparation and celebrations (Parks and Yamashiro 147). After the Dark Days and the Treaty of Treason, the Capitol brought in the Hunger Games, which, as already had been mentioned, were used to scare and punish the people of Panem for trying to put up a fight with the Capitol. This cruelty began when “the wealthy victors, who rule the Capitol, passed a law dictating that once each year, the nation would commemorate their victory and remind the vanquished of the consequences of rebellion (Sloan et al 29). Due to the dictatorship being practiced in Panem, the President has Peacekeepers, or the police, who monitor every move of the citizens in the districts and “keep an Orwellian peace, administer an Orwellian law, materializing in Capitol’s silent hovercraft, which ‘appear out of nowhere,’ kill or kidnap, and then are gone, ‘vanished into thin air’” (Thomas 390). However, even though it is known that they can be brutal and cruel, Katniss mentions that in District 12 “most of the Peacekeepers turn a



blind eye to the few of us who hunt because they're as hungry for fresh meat as anybody is. In fact, they're among our best customers. But the idea that someone might be arming the Seam would never have been allowed" (Collins 6-7). In addition to Peacekeepers, there are also people who work in the Capitol as slaves or servants and are referred to as being Avoxes: "'What's an Avox?' I ask stupidly. 'Someone who committed a crime. They cut her tongue so she can't speak,' says Haymitch. 'She's probably a traitor of some sort. Not likely you'd know her'" (Collins 77).

## 6. The Hunger Games

The Games – a modern version of the circenses of Ancient Rome (Thomas 365), displays a much crueler entertainment than the one Romans had in the gladiator games: “the rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate” (Collins 19) who are “aged 11 to 18 years old...and forced to compete to the death against tributes from the other districts (Sloan et al 429). This is “the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion” (Collins 19). This decree, entitled The Hunger Games, puts a tribute against a tribute (Sloan et al 429). “Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins” (Collins 19). The game’s motto, “May the odds be ever in your favor!” is flippantly tossed about at any opportunity, reminding the teens that living through this ordeal is mostly due to luck rather than skill or attribute (Sloan et al 429): “the real message is clear. ‘Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen’” (Collins 19). In the novel, they celebrate the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, which is also 74 years of having the Hunger Games active.

The Hunger Games start on the day of the Reaping where, in a ceremony which is held at the District square, tributes are picked. On this day, a girl’s and boy’s name is picked from the bowls and they are then presented to their District on stage. Usually the wealthier districts have tributes who volunteer, “in some districts, in which winning the reaping is such a great honor, people are eager to risk their lives, the volunteering is complicated” (Collins 23), to show their power and years of training for this moment. Yet, the risk of being picked is higher for the poor: “the reaping system is unfair, with the poor getting the worst of it. You become eligible for the reaping the day you turn twelve. That year, your name is entered once. At thirteen, twice.... the age of eighteen....when your name goes into the pool seven times” (Collins 13-14). The risk is higher because, due to the lack of food, children are allowed to enter their names more than once and for each name they enter, they get a tesserae: “each tesserae is worth a meager year’s supply of grain and oil for one person” (Collins 14). For example, Katniss’s name, in the first novel, has been entered 20 times and she was only 16 years old.

The next step after the Reaping is saying goodbye to your loved ones. They are taken backstage where in a room they each say **farewell** to their families. They are then put on a **train**: “The tribute train is fancier than even the room in the Justice Building. We are each given our own chambers that have a bedroom, a dressing area, and a private bathroom with hot and cold running water. We don’t have hot water at home, unless we boil it. There are drawers filled with fine clothes” (Collins 43). In these trains, they are served rich food which can come as a shock to tributes who come from poor Districts, which is what happened to Katniss and Peeta: “But I’m stuffing myself because I’ve never had food like this, so good and so much, and because probably the best thing I can do between now and the Games is put on a few pounds” (Collins 45). The train ride lasts for a couple of days until it reaches the Capitol.

Once they get to their destination, the next step in the process of the Games is to immediately take tributes to a room, which is called the Remake Center, where they are pampered and beautified for the Games: “I’ve been in the **Remake Center** for more than three hours...” (Collins 61). After the Remake Center, tributes are introduced to their **stylists** and this is where Katniss meets her stylist Cinna, who is a fresh face among the stylists in the Capitol. The stylists are there to make the tributes interesting outfits “for the opening ceremonies, you’re supposed to wear something that suggests your district’s principal industry. District 11, agriculture. District 4, fishing. District 3, factories. This means that coming from District 12, Peeta and I will be in some kind of coal miner’s getup” (Collins 66). In these outfits, the tributes will be presented to the Capitol in chariot rides and, later, in the interview where they will be introduced to all of Panem individually.

The next step leading to the Hunger Games are the chariot rides where the tributes are placed in chariots which are pulled by horses and they wave to the audience that watch them pass by and cheer. The **chariot rides** are stopped just in front of President Snow, who gives a speech onstage about the past Games and wishes everyone luck in this new one. The tributes are then driven back and straight to the **Training Center**, which “will be our home/prison until the Games begin” (Collins 68). For three days, the 24 tributes train here the different techniques of combat that could help them in the Games. On the third day, as a test or evaluation, the tributes have to do their private trainings session in front of the Gamemakers, who then grade the tributes from one

to twelve and give the training scores on television. These scores are actually prediction of who will do well or survive the longest in the Games.

After the physical trainings, the **interview** is held so that the public can learn about each tribute and choose the one they favor most. The interview is held the night before the Games: the tributes peak individually with the popular Capital host Caesar Flickerman, wearing new outfits designed by their stylists:

the creature standing before me in the full-length mirror has come from another world. Where skin shimmers and eyes flash and apparently they make their clothes from jewels. Because my dress, oh, my dress is entirely covered in reflective precious gems, red and yellow and white with bits of blue that accent the tips of the flame design. The slightest movement gives the impression I am engulfed in tongues of fire. I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun. (Collins 120-121)

On the next day, the tributes are taken by a **hovercraft to where the Games** will be held. When out of the hovercraft, the tributes find themselves each on their own pad, waiting for the Gamemakers to signal the start of the Games. All 24 pads are placed in a circle around the cornucopia which holds the weapons and backpacks with little food and survival kits: “a giant golden horn shaped like a cone with a curved tail, the mouth of which is at least twenty feet high, spilling over with the things that will give us life here in the arena” (Collins 147). The tributes either have to run away from the cornucopia or towards it as fast as they can to reach a weapon before being killed by someone who was faster than them.

Every year as new tributes are picked, the surviving tributes, or in other words, the victors of previous Games are given the role of **mentoring** the new tributes from their district. In the first novel, for example, Katniss and Peeta as new tributes are introduced to their mentor, Haymitch Abernathy, who is a victor of the 16<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, or the second Quarter Quell<sup>1</sup>, and also the second victor in District 12 yet the only living District 12 victor left: “In seventy four years, we have had exactly two. Only one is still alive. Haymitch Abernathy, a paunchy, middle-aged man”

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<sup>1</sup> Every 25 years there is a type of the Hunger Games called The Quarter Quell. The purpose of this type of the Games is to be different with more fun, celebration and horror than all the rest. The tributes are not picked in the usual way, nor are the Games held in usual arenas. Until the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, there had been two Quarter Quells the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 50<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games.

(Collins 20). The role of each mentor is to help tributes before and during the Hunger Games in whatever way they can: “You know your mentor is your lifeline to the world in these Games. The one who advises you, lines up your sponsors, and dictates the presentation of any gifts” (Collins 47).

The tributes are usually not allowed to bring anything into the Games, out of fear not to kill themselves before the Games begin. However, they are allowed to bring a **token** that reminds them of home, which they are not allowed to use as a weapon. For example, Katniss is given a pendent by her friend and the daughter of District 12<sup>th</sup> mayor, Madge Undersee. The pendent was almost denied by the Gamemakers to be taken into the Games because it could be used as a weapon.

“The Hunger Games aren’t a beauty contest, but the best-looking tributes always seem to pull more sponsors” (Collins 58). The more **sponsors** they are able to pull, the more favorable they will be and the more help and gifts they will receive from people outside the arena. For example, Katniss’s “star-crossed love” with Peeta was a thing that made them favorable in the games. In addition, Cinna, her stylist, made her into a girl everyone wants to be: “I want the audience to recognize you when you’re in the arena,” says Cinna dreamily. “Katniss, the girl who was on fire” (Collins 67). These things help tributes receive numerous gifts throughout the Games. Another example would be when Katniss burns her leg in a fire the Gamemakers caused. Due to being a favorite of the Capitol, she gains sponsors who gift her with **medicine** for her injured leg: “sitting on my sleeping bag is a small plastic pot attached to a silver parachute. My first gift from a sponsor!” (Collins 186). The **second** gift comes from District 11 after Rue, a little girl from District 11, died in her arms and Katniss buried the girl and put flowers on her grave: “As a thank-you? Or because, like me, they don’t like to let debts go unpaid? For whatever reason, this is a first. A district gift to a tribute who’s not your own” (Collins 236). She receives three more gifts throughout the Games. Not many tributes get five gifts all together, some do not get any at all, because it is costly to send one into the Games and most districts are poor.

The **Arenas** in which the Hunger Games are held “are historic sites, preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for Capitol residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place” (Collins 143). The Arenas, when the Hunger Games are active, change every year: “the twenty four tributes will be

imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland” (Collins 19), so the tributes do not know in what kind of climate or setting they will be put in:

We spent one Hunger Games watching the players freeze to death at night. You could hardly see them because they were just huddled in balls and had no wood for fires or torches or anything. It was considered very anti-climactic in the Capitol, all those quiet, bloodless deaths. Since then, there’s usually been wood to make fires. (Collins 40)

The 74<sup>th</sup> Games are held in a forest-like arena, with a cornucopia in the center and a stream on the far end of the arena.

The **victor** is the last surviving tribute in the Hunger Games: “There’s usually a lag of a few days between the end of the competition and the presentation of the victor so that they can put the starving, wounded, mess of a person back together again” (Collins 344). As a reward for their victory in the Games, the victors usually get a house in the Victory Village: “If we win, we’ll each get a house in the part of town reserved for Hunger Games’ victors. Long ago, when the Games began, the Capitol had built a dozen fine houses in each district. Of course, in ours only one is occupied. Most of the others have never been lived in at all” (Collins 300). Another reward a victor gets is that they do not have to participate in the Games ever again. Needless to say, many victors after the Games suffer from PTSD, nightmares, sleeplessness, or addictions. A good example is Haymitch who is “drunk ... every year” (Collins 47), he drinks not to feel and basically to forget the horror he saw in the Arena.

## 7. Symbols

In the novel, quite a few symbols emerge giving meaning to the characters, relationships, and events. One of these symbols is the mockingjay pin that Katniss gets from her friend Madge Undersee:

They let you wear one thing from your district in the arena. One thing to remind you of home. Will you wear this?" She holds out the circular gold pin that was on her dress earlier. I hadn't paid much attention to it before, but now I see it's a small bird in flight. "Your pin?" I say. Wearing a token from my district is about the last thing on my mind.... "Promise you'll wear it into the arena, Katniss?" she asks. "Promise?" (Collins 39)

Katniss does wear it as a token in the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games and it symbolizes survival.

Another symbol that appears in the Games that Cinna is so fascinated by is Katniss's braid that her mother made for her that morning before the Reaping: "'Who did your hair?' 'My mother,' I say. 'It's beautiful. Classic really. And in almost perfect balance with your profile. She has very clever fingers,' he says" (Collins 64). The braid is the symbol of home and family.

Katniss's dresses that her stylist Cinna made operate as yet another symbol in the novel. Usually the costumes District 12 tributes wore were not creative or unusual: "since the baggy miner's jumpsuits are not particularly becoming, our tributes usually end up in skimpy outfits and hats with headlamps. One year, our tributes were stark naked and covered in black powder to represent coal dust. It's always dreadful and does nothing to win favor with the crowd" (Collins 66). However, Cinna made it his job to make something spectacular this year of District 12:

I am dressed in what will either be the most sensational or the deadliest costume in the opening ceremonies. I'm in a simple black unitard that covers me from ankle to neck. Shiny leather boots lace up to my knees. But it's the fluttering cape made of streams of orange, yellow, and red and the matching headpiece that define this costume. Cinna plans to light them on fire just before our chariot rolls into the streets. "It's not real

flame, of course, just a little synthetic fire Portia and I came up with. You'll be perfectly safe," he says. (Collins 67)

One more important symbol found in the first novel is the District 12 salute as Katniss is picked and ready to depart for the rooms where her family will visit her one last time. In a surprising gesture, the people below the stage salute her instead of applauding:

then something unexpected happens. At least, I don't expect it because I don't think of District 12 as a place that cares about me.... At first one, then another, then almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district, occasionally seen at funerals. It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love. (Collins 25)

This gesture stands for several things: not only for pity and unhappiness her District feels but also for the sense of unity and togetherness that binds them in their ordeal: "the commentators are not sure what to say about the crowd's refusal to applaud. The silent salute" (Collins 47). Katniss also used this salute in the Games when she thanked District 11 for the bread they sent her.

Throughout the novel, Collins also puts emphasis on the importance of bread. The bread initiates the first contact between Katniss and Peeta and thus symbolizes the hope: "to this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope" (Collins 33). The bread is also closely connected with dandelions. This flower is a sign of survival for Katniss. She sees it one day, after looking away from Peeta in the school yard, and realizes that she can overcome hunger and help her family who is dying of starvation by using the skills her father taught her in the woods and by gathering food for her family in this way: "I dropped my gaze, embarrassed, and that's when I saw it. The first dandelion of the year. A bell went off in my head. I thought of the hours spent in the woods with my father and I knew how we were going to survive" (Collins 33) and "I plucked it carefully and hurried home. I grabbed a bucket and Prim's hand and headed to the Meadow and yes, it was dotted with the golden-headed weeds.... That night, we gorged ourselves on dandelion salad and the rest of the bakery bread" (Collins 49-50). Eventually she becomes a good archer and hunter, which are the skills that helped her in the Hunger Games as well.



## Conclusion

The story is set in a fictional, post-apocalyptic, dystopian country called Panem which is placed where North America once stood. It is ruled by a dictator, who manipulates his people into thinking that their life could not be any better than it is, that it could be only worse. Because of this, some brave souls decided to start a rebellion that failed and then they were severely punished by the Capitol with the Hunger Games that resemble the gladiator games in ancient Rome. The Hunger Games are held in the Capitol of Panem, a faraway city where the wealthy live while the rest of Panem is divided into 12 Districts, the 12<sup>th</sup> being the poorest district and the District in which the protagonist of the novel, Katniss Everdeen, lives. She is a girl who volunteers to enter the Games in place of her younger sister Prim and who with the help of her District mate manages to win the Games as a pair thus breaking the rules of allowing only one victor. Because of this, the story has high resemblance to ancient Roman and Greek history, especially to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The author also uses the phrase “panem et circenses,” meaning bread and circuses, which is an easy way to describe what the Hunger Games are really about and it is also used to name the country the story is set in.

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