

Summary of The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Short book summaries for busy
people on the go.

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This version was published on 2012-09-08



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Overview

The Hunger Games is a dystopian novel that takes place in a post-apocalyptic country called Panem. Although the book is marketed as a young adult novel and the main characters are teenagers, it is filled with dark themes and violence, making it more appropriate for older teens and adults than kids under the age of 14. The book follows the story of Katniss Everdeen, a rebellious 16-year-old girl who is forced to compete in a televised “game” that sees 24 teenagers fighting to the death. The book, which is the first in a three-part series, is told in the first person by Katniss herself, and focuses on the unfairness of Panem’s unbalanced social and political systems.

Part One: The Tributes

The Hunger Games begins with Katniss waking up the day of “the reaping,” the ceremony in which teenagers are chosen to participate in the bloody Hunger Games. Collins introduces readers to Katniss and her younger sister Prim, a delicate 12-year-old who Katniss loves fiercely. Katniss lives with Prim and their mother in an impoverished area called “the Seam” within District 12, the last of Panem’s 12 districts. District 12 is the country’s mining district and is considered to be weaker and less affluent than some of the country’s other areas.

Before the reaping, Katniss sneaks into the forbidden woods to hunt with her bow and arrow. She is uniquely proficient with the bow and is able to feed her family with small animals that she kills in the woods. She hunts with her friend Gale, with whom she has an easygoing relationship, with a romantic undercurrent. The two discuss the possibility of running away before the reaping but acknowledge that they have the responsibility of looking after their younger siblings, as both of their fathers have died in mining accidents long ago.

Katniss explains the process of the reaping. Kids aged 12 to 18 are entered into a lottery. The name of one boy and one girl, dubbed tributes, are drawn from each of Panem’s 12 Districts and those chosen must fight to the death in a televised battle that takes place over the course of a few weeks. Only the last teen standing survives at the end of the game. The Hunger Games were devised as a reminder to all the people of the Districts of Panem that they are

always at the mercy of the all-powerful Capitol.

Katniss and her family go to the District's main square for the reaping. At the ceremony is the now middle-aged Haymitch Abernathy, the only competitor from District 12 to ever have won the Hunger Games. Capitol representative Effie Trinket draws the first name and calls for Katniss's sister, Prim. Katniss immediately stands up and offers to take Prim's place, which is within the rules. The boy tribute is called next and it is Peeta Mellark, the son of the town's baker. Katniss remembers a brief moment they had together years ago when he gave her a piece of stolen bread when she was starving, but other than that the two barely know each other. Katniss resents Peeta for having witnessed her in such a humiliating position.

Before leaving for the games, Katniss is visited by her friend Madge, the daughter of the District mayor. Madge gives her a golden pin with the symbol of a bird called a mockingjay on it. Mocking-jays are muttations, or genetically-engineered animals, that mimic sounds and songs. Madge asks Katniss to wear the pin during the competition. The mocking-jay will become Katniss' personal symbol throughout the arc of all three books.

Effie Trinket boards a train with Peeta and Katniss and they head to the Capitol to prepare for the games. They learn that Haymitch will mentor them through the games, which is problematic because he is a hopeless alcoholic with little self-control. The train enters the Capitol, which is a futuristic, modern city full of over-consumption and frivolity that stands in stark contrast to the poverty and strife that Katniss knows from District 12. Katniss is paired

with a style team, headed by a gentle stylist named Cinna, who will eventually become Katniss's confidant. Cinna designs Katniss an outfit for the opening ceremonies that can be set on fire. Thanks to the outfit, Katniss earns the nickname "girl on fire."

Peeta and Katniss begin to prepare for their televised interviews, in which they will try to win over the affection of the public and secure sponsors who can send them gifts during the games. These gifts will be doled out by Haymitch during the games, who will literally be able to make them fall out of the sky with tiny parachutes. Despite having a bitter demeanor, Katniss is able to suppress her feelings about the Capitol and charms the audience. In his interview, Peeta tells the audience that he is in love with Katniss, but she assumes the declaration is simply part of his strategy to win the Games.