



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 8 to 10

About the Author: This lesson was written for MediaSmarts by Neil Andersen, President, Association for Media Literacy and Past Board Member, MediaSmarts.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Overview

This lesson examines the movie *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, some of its promotions, and social justice activists' responses. It explores values messages within the movie and in its promotions and invites students to consider the functions of stories beyond entertainment and how they might be used to motivate action. It also invites students to consider issues of independence and interdependence in the movie and in their lives.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will recognize and appreciate roles of media in communication, society, and their personal lives
- Students will recognize the ways in which media shape messages and construct a sense of what the world is or how it works
- Students will explore and assess media messages, including their sources, intents, and values

Background

The Hunger Games is a dystopian trilogy written for young adult readers by Suzanne Collins. The novels are being adapted into four movies (*The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay Part 1 and Part 2*). Ms. Collins was also involved in writing the screenplay.

This lesson explores events in and beyond the movie version of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, specifically themes expressed in the movie that have been responded to by fans and activists. The movie has been received as entertainment, but also as a call to ethical behaviours, with the actions of its characters exhibiting contrasting values.

The Story

The novels and movies tell the story of teenaged Katniss Everdeen and the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem. The wealthy Capitol rules the impoverished surrounding Districts, treating their starving citizens like slaves. As punishment for a past uprising, Capitol's rulers hold yearly Hunger Games, where two youths—called Tributes—from each District compete in a *Survivor*-style game to kill one another until only one Tribute remains. The training, grooming, ceremonial opening, closing and competing are all televised for entertainment.



Katniss learns that, to win, she needs to play to the audience's soft spots and gain sponsors. She hides her true feelings and actions during the games, pretending to be in love with Peeta, her fellow Tribute, and never showing her fear. When she and Peeta are the only Tributes left alive, Katniss prepares for their mutual suicides, forcing the game's administrators to declare a tie to keep them alive for the victory tour.

Unbeknownst to Katniss, rebellions against the oppressive Capitol have begun in several Districts, and Katniss and Peeta are forced to return to the arena in a special edition of the Hunger Games. The game's officials hope that troublesome Katniss and Peeta will be killed.

Katniss and Peeta each vow to keep one another safe in the new games. They ally themselves with other players until Katniss destroys the arena with a lightning bolt. Peeta and other Tributes are captured by Capitol police, but Katniss and several Tributes escape to the Districts, where they discover a civil war has begun.

Themes

One theme involves negotiating between **becoming** who you want to be and who others want you to be. Katniss begins as a secret rebel who breaks the Capitol's no-hunting rules to help her starving family and others. She is a reluctant Tribute, but learns that pretending to be glamorous, fearless and in love with Peeta pleases the audience, so she plays along to win sponsors and survive.

Another theme involves **independence and interdependence**. Katniss and Peeta wish to be independent, yet must depend on one another to survive the Hunger Games. The Districts want independence, but the Capitol needs them to provide its wealth and the Tributes whose deaths provide its entertainment.

A third theme involves demonstrating **values**. The Capitolists use their power to put people in the Districts in harm's way in hazardous working conditions and in using the young Tributes to fight to the death. Katniss volunteers as a Tribute to protect her younger sister, then continues to protect Peeta and other players, continually putting herself in harm's way to save them. She demonstrates caring for others in contrast to the uncaring attitude of those in the Capitol.

Procedure

Begin by asking how many people in the class have seen the movie(s) or read the book(s). Pick two or three students who are particularly familiar with the *Catching Fire* book and/or movie to serve as "experts". Show the trailer for the film (available at <http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi130262553>) and give those students who have not seen the movie or read the book a chance to ask the experts any questions they may have following the trailer.

In order to explore the themes identified above with students, choose questions from each of the three topics below. Please do NOT address all the questions or all the topics at any one time, but select a few that are appropriate to the situation and audience (some questions/topics may be omitted).

Alternatively, you might divide the class into groups, with each group exploring one of these themes and then reporting back to the class.



1. Becoming

“It’s all about controlling the narrative.”

Like other teens, Katniss’ is deciding what kind of adult she might become. Her volunteering to be a Tribute complicates her choices immensely. She might remain as she was when she was a normal girl in District 12, likely to be killed. She might take the advice of her handlers, remake herself to please her audience, and survive. In the process, she explores others’ values and compares them to her own.

A website—supposedly run by the Capitol (www.capitolcouture.pn)—has been created as part of the movie’s promotion. Photos of Katniss and other characters appear in the website in a variety of costumes and hairstyles. *Catching Fire*’s movie release is also being used to promote *Cover Girl* make-up, whose looks—one for each District—are promoted on *Cover Girl*’s website (<http://www.covergirl.com/catching-fire>).

Have students explore each website to assess what kinds of people they seem to be encouraging their audiences to become.

- Do the sites emphasize people’s appearances or the content of their characters?
- Do the target audiences for the websites seem to be people in the Districts or in the Capitol? Why?
- Does the *Cover Girl* site support the values expressed in Katniss’ public speeches and actions or her private speeches and actions?
- Is it ironic that the faux website (www.capitolcouture.pn), which is run by the Capitol, expresses similar values to the *Cover Girl* site?
- *Cover Girl* is funding both the *Cover Girl* site AND the *Capitol Couture* site. How do the two sites reinforce each-others’ values?
- How might the similarities in values of the two websites suggest that the people promoting the movie and those at *Cover Girl* believe that the movie audience’s values are more like the Capitol’s values than the Districts’ values?
- Is it possible to enjoy creating a fashion look and still value people’s characters over their actions?
- Is it OK for a movie company to make a profit any way it can, or should its promotional activities be consistent with its themes and values?

2. Independence and Interdependence

Teens develop increased independence as they age, but they also learn about interdependence.

Discuss with students:

- In what ways have you become more independent?
- In what ways have you become more interdependent?

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss threatens a double-suicide at the end of the 74th Games in hopes that the judges will allow both she and Peeta to live. By doing this, she uses her independence to preserve her interdependence with Peeta.



When she and Peeta are drafted back into the 75th Hunger Games in *Catching Fire*, they again must exercise and develop their independence and interdependence.

- What do they learn about independence and interdependence in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*?
- What might viewers learn about independence and interdependence?
- What is the dependence and interdependence between the Capitol and the Districts?
- Are there real-world examples of the fictional Capitol and Districts? E.g., Washington DC and the other states? Ottawa and the provinces and territories? The Developed World (North America/Europe) and the Developing World (Africa/South Asia)?
- What are the differences and similarities?
- Do these other examples also have independence and interdependence?
- What might viewers learn about their own lives from the relationship between the Capitol and the Districts?

3. Values

“What if we used fantasy not as an escape from our world,
but an invitation to look deeper into it?” Andrew Slack

Andrew Slack founded the *Harry Potter Alliance* and its website (<http://thehpalliance.org/>) as a way not only to celebrate fans' love of Harry Potter stories, but also to organize and direct fans' energies into social justice activities. The Harry Potter Alliance has expanded its fandom to other movies and directed fans' energies to helping people in need.

Mr. Slack has expressed strong dissatisfaction with the promotion of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*.

Read the following questions and then read Mr. Slack's editorial in *The Los Angeles Times* (<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ycWyfgl7X0YJ:www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-1125-slack-hunger-games-covergirl-capitol-20131125.0,1264290.story+&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca&client=firefox-a>).

- Why do some stories enjoy worldwide popularity while others are quickly forgotten?
- What might people learn from their favourite stories?
- What does Mr. Slack like about *The Hunger Games* books?
- What does Mr. Slack dislike about *Catching Fire*'s promotions?
- Mr. Slack admits that Lionsgate, the movie's production and promotion company, is promoting some social justice activities, but says that is not enough. Why?
- Do you agree that the values expressed in the movie's promotions contradict the movie's values?
- Do you think that readers and viewers who use the fantasies in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* 'to look deeper into' our world will understand how it works better?
- How might readers and viewers who use the fantasies in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* 'to look deeper into' our world use their energies for greater social justice?



Extension Activities

Persuasive Video

The Harry Potter Alliance has created a website called <http://oddsinourfavor.org/>. The website contains a video that describes The Harry Potter Alliance's dissatisfactions and what it wants people to do.

Watch the video and discuss the following questions:

- How does the video use sound, editing and special effects to make it look like it is a part of a rebel protest?
- What connections does the video make between injustices in Panem's fantasy world and injustices in the real world?
- What does the website ask people to do?
- Would you post a selfie to this site?
- What would posting a selfie accomplish?
- How else might someone show their support for the Harry Potter Alliance's goals or their dissatisfaction with business and government behaviours?

Thematic Imagery

Two thematic images used in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* are the mockingjay pin worn by Katniss and the three-fingered salute. Each of the books' covers represents the mockingjay in different, symbolic poses (different treatments of the mockingjay can be found at: http://asupersunnyspot.blogspot.ca/2012_04_01_archive.html). In Panem, the three-fingered salute becomes classified as a crime.

There are three themes discussed above:

- negotiating between **becoming** who you want to be and who others want you to be;
- balancing **independence and interdependence**;
- demonstrating **values** through actions.

Have students design an image that represents one or more of these themes.

- Designs might be based on nature, using animals or plants, or might be completely abstract, using shapes and colours.
- Students should be prepared to explain how their design represents their chosen theme(s).

