



## The Parent Coaching Institute's Discussion Guide for *The Hunger Games*

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### **Note to Parents:**

I saw the movie, *The Help* recently with my husband. He liked it very much and said, "It was a solid movie." I thought it OK. Since I had read the book beforehand, the richness of the characters, the details of their lives, and the narrative of the heroine were sadly lacking in the movie, in my opinion. But that's what usually happens in translating great books into movies—something is lost—and often a lot is lost.

Books get inside characters' heads in ways film cannot. And while film gives us stimulating visual displays and an engaging narrative, it can't reproduce or relate the narrator's experience like words can. When your child reads *The Hunger Games*, there are always two points of view—what is happening around Katniss and how Katniss is interpreting these situations. Humanity in all its complexity lies in the narrator's interpretations. These give your child a full spectrum of thoughts and emotions about the experiences, helping your child attune to important concepts and how he or she may be thinking about them. If Katniss is feeling this, then maybe I am, too? If Katniss thinks something, I as the reader, have the opportunity to consider an opposing view as well as aligning with her thoughts. The book gives time for your child to sort through ideas and deep feelings, to ponder and consider, in a way that a two-hour, action-packed movie cannot.

If your child has read *The Hunger Games* and then sees the movie with you, these questions can spur interesting discussion. (Or after seeing the movie, your child can read the book—works both ways, except the film's images will stay in her mind while reading—most likely.) Find out what images were like the one's in your child's head after s/he read the book and which movie images just didn't quite make it. And be sure to discuss how Katniss makes sense of her horrific experiences and how she might grow and learn from them.

1. What kind of person is Katniss? Consider her feelings toward her oppressors, her sister Prim, Gale, and Peeta. What are Katniss' strengths and qualities? What are her weaknesses? How did she change and grow over the course of the story? What did she learn about herself by the end? Do you think her decision at the end of the games to ingest the poisonous berries was a good decision, why or why not?

2. What kind of people find bloody murder and human suffering entertaining? Think about the lives of the people in Panem. Do you think the watching of the Hunger Games was a substitute “life” for them? Why or why not?
3. Katniss trained herself to kill animals for her and her family’s survival. Early in the story, she made this statement to Gale: “The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all.” What does this say about the dilemma Katniss was about to face? What does it say about the reality of her life? Katniss describes her inability to act to save the red-haired girl as, “Just like I was watching the games.” Do you think a lifetime of watching the games has deadened her to empathy? Why or why not? Do you think she regrets what watching the games has done to her? Why or why not?
4. “It’s all a show,” Haymitch says at one point. How do Katniss and Peeta adjust who they are to adapt to who their audience wants them to be? In our times, we have shows like *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, and *The Bachelorette* that play on people’s feelings of fear, love, betrayal “for the audience.” Do you see any parallels between shows like these and *The Hunger Games*? For instance, how is the show, *After the Final Rose* like the interview show Katniss and Peeta participated that showed highlights of the “games?” How do you define voyeurism? What does it say about the quality of people’s lives when someone else’s suffering or someone’s else love life is “the final word in entertainment?” Remember when Katniss buries her face in the hood of her sweatshirt so none of the audience can see her face? She wants to be alone to say good-bye to Thresh. What does this show about her ability to be aware of and express her feelings to herself, with the audience always watching her?
5. Katniss says that she “hates the Capitol” and not the boy she killed at one point, then soon later, she is hating her enemies violently and wanting revenge for what they did to Rue. Do you understand her roller coaster emotions? Why or why not?
6. If you would have written this story what would you have done differently? Would you have pitted Rue against Katniss at the end? Why or why not? Would you have left Cato to suffer as long as he did? Why or why not? Would you have had Katniss kill Peeta? Why or why not?
7. Katniss and Peeta are forever changed as a result of this horrible experience. Katniss says, “I’ll spend the rest of my life in this arena trying to think my way out.” What did she mean by that?
8. The Gamemakers keep changing the rules. Katniss and all the tributes are virtually slaves, imprisoned and entirely at their mercy. In order to survive, they have to follow the rules and do what is demanded of them. Do think Katniss and Peeta held a sense of their individual integrity amid this very difficult circumstance? Why or why not?

9. In Panem, the poor are also like slaves. What indicators do you have by the end of the story that Katniss has changed and now she no longer can tolerate this injustice as she did at the beginning of the story?
10. If you read the book and saw the movie, which do you like better, the book or the movie, why? Did the movie display the violence in a meaningful way? Or was it overdone—glorified so that audiences would be titillated—much like the audiences in *The Hunger Games*? How do you distinguish between gratuitous violence and sensitive portrayals of violence?
11. The Hunger Games is an implicit critique of a culture that is based on disturbing elements that already exist in our own society. Do you come out of the movie (or after reading the book) ready to understand these baser elements of our own culture in a different way?