

# Seeing Myself In “The Hunger Games” \*Spoilers\*



Why blog about “The Hunger Games?” Everyone is talking about it? Including fellow Catholic Review blogger Matt Palmer.

I don’t read much fiction, but this book has kept my attention and truly drawn me into the life of Katniss Everdeen, the book’s heroine and narrator. The Hunger Games is an annual event held in an arena in the capitol of a country called Panem. Panem has 12 districts and each district must send two tributes, as they are called, one girl and one boy. Twenty-four in all. Tributes are chosen randomly as their name is pulled out of a bowl and must be between the ages of 12 and 18. The winner is the last tribute still alive and wins food and other things for themselves, their family, and their district for the next year.

There was a 13th district before the great rebellion. During that rebellion the districts lost and District 13 was completely destroyed by the Capitol. Ever since, The Hunger Games have been an annual reminder of the strength and control of the Capitol over the lives of every district resident.

There are many different themes addressed in the book. These include the effect of war on kids, dealing with a government with virtually absolute control, no God or higher power in the book, poverty and hunger, as well as the fear of the rich minority losing control to the impoverished majority.

Are any of these themes more important than the other? No. You will resonate with the theme that is closest to your life.

The life of our heroine, Katniss, is consumed by taking care of her mother and little sister after the death of her father in the district’s coal mines. It is for her little sister that Katniss volunteers as tribute for District 12 at the annual Hunger Games.

I read the book and marveled at Katniss' ability to survive and grow up faster than she should have needed to. But Katniss is aware that The Hunger Games are another way of the country's capitol to show that they are in control. The capitol is in charge of how well you live, and, during the games, whether you live or die.

I was struck by a couple of things in the book. The first was the rampant problem of hunger, not only in Katniss' home in District 12, but in most of the districts. This is in stark contrast to the capitol where there are fancy things and no one has to worry about going to bed hungry or dying of starvation.

The second thing that struck me was the way The Hunger Games are run. As each year passes, the people are required to watch the games and the spectacle that occurs before the games in the capitol. What better way to remind your citizens to stay in line but to make sure that each year 23 families lose their child and there is nothing a family can do about it. The more money you have, and the more resources you have, the less likely your child is to be picked as tribute. To get access to more food, a child 12 or older may add extra entries to The Hunger Games, and the number of times your name is in the bowl can get pretty high if you have to continue to receive the extra help.

It's not too much to stretch the imagination to envision a world like Panem. A world where the rich control everyone else's destiny and no amount of hard work can change that. After all, a study of history reveals many societies where this is the case. But here, in the United States, that certainly isn't true, right?

In a world that has produced "The Hunger Games" God doesn't exist. People rely on each other, skill, and talent to live. Their hope lies in humans, not a loving God so they don't know that this suffering is temporary and bearable. After all, God doesn't give us more than we can bear.

No, what struck me most about "The Hunger Games" was how it sharpened my view of our current world and society. This isn't to say that I'm without compassion (the neighborhood stray Mr. Cat would think I am). It means that my sensitivity to the issues of teen violence, hunger, excess, and such have grown. Like Katniss, I have no

trouble explaining the consequences of our excessive, throw away culture to my family and anyone who will listen. I do because it bothers me and tears at my soul. And I believe anyone who reads the book (forget about the movie for a minute) with their eyes wide open will see this as well.

Maybe God doesn't exist in Panem because the author doesn't believe in God or thought it would complicate the storyline. I don't really know what her motives where, but I can say that, for those of us who believe in God, we should walk away from "The Hunger Games" more aware of what's going on around us — the hungry, the poor, the imprisoned, the dying. We should feel that tug in our hearts to do more than we've been doing because we can all share something with someone who has nothing.

I ask you, dear reader, regardless of whether you've seen the movie version of "The Hunger Games" to take time and read at least the first book in the trilogy. Read it and then look around at the lives we live and see if we are headed to a society and country like the fictional Panem and what you can do about it.