



# The triumph of Anthropocentrism in Suzanne Collins's 'The Hunger Games'

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**Anthropocentrism** is the belief that human beings are the central or most significant species on the planet (in the sense that they are considered to have a moral status or value higher than that of other animals), or the assessment of reality through an exclusively human perspective. The term can be used interchangeably with **humanocentrism**, and some refer to the concept as **human supremacy** or "human exceptionalism". The mediocrity principle is the opposite of Anthropocentrism. It is a major concept in the field of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy, where it is often considered to be the root cause of problems created by human interaction with the environment. However, many proponents of anthropocentrism state that this is not necessarily the case: they argue that a sound long-term view acknowledges that a healthy, sustainable environment is necessary for humans and that the real issue is shallow anthropocentrism

The Hunger Games (2008) is the first book of the wildly popular trilogy of young adult novels from author Suzanne Collins in which Anthropocentrism is considered to be profoundly embedded in many modern human cultures and conscious acts. The series is set in the country of Panem, a post-apocalyptic version of North America. Every year the



government in the Capitol organizes an event known as the Hunger Games: a bloody, gladiator-style fight-to-the-death battle between 24 randomly-selected teenagers from the oppressed Districts of Panem. To top it all off, the carnage is broadcast live on television – as entertainment for the residents of the Capitol and a reminder to the residents of the Districts of the totalitarian government’s ultimate power.

With all the violence and gore and killing of people on live television, these books have been nothing less than a best-selling sensation. The Hunger Games trilogy is to express unity with people striving to survive was used in 2014 by anti-government protestors in Thailand, at least seven of whom were arrested for it.

Collins says that she drew inspiration for the series from both classical and contemporary sources. The main classical source of inspiration came from the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. As a punishment for past crimes, Minos forces Athens to sacrifice seven youths and seven maidens to the Minotaur, by whom they are killed in a vast labyrinth. Collins says that even as a child the idea stunned her since "it was just so cruel", as Athens was forced to sacrifice its own children.

Collins also cites the Roman gladiator games. She feels that there are three key elements to create a good game; an all powerful and ruthless government, people forced to fight to the death, and it being a source of popular entertainment.

A contemporary source of inspiration was Collins's recent fascination with reality television programmes. She relates this to the Hunger Games in how they are not just



entertainment, but also a reminder to the districts of their rebellion. On a tired night, Collins says that while she was channel-surfing the television where she saw people competing for some prize, and then saw footage of the Iraq war. She described how the two combined in an "unsettling way" to create the first ideas for the series.

The main source of power in *The Hunger Games* is clear: the totalitarian government of the Capitol. Because the Capitol holds most of the country of Panem's wealth, the government there is able to control the people in all of the districts across Panem. The Hunger Games, then, are the ultimate display of the government's power and were designed to warn the populace against rebellion. In the Hunger Games, the citizens of Panem become nothing more than pawns in an elaborate game of life or death. Since only one teenage contestant, or "tribute," can win, the tributes are forced to kill teens from the other districts and one from their own district. It's all symbolic of how the Capitol prevents the people in the districts from joining forces and rebelling – the Games keep the people of the districts divided and fighting among themselves. Worst of all, the government broadcasts the event live on television, reinforcing the idea that the tributes are giving their lives for little more than the entertainment of the Capitol.

This book is also about ways to resist the kind of power that the Capitol represents. While the people of Panem might not have the Capitol's money, they do have other ways of fighting back. Remember when District 12 gives Katniss their salute? Or when Katniss covers Rue's dead body in flowers? These symbolic gestures call attention to the fact that



there are actual people in the Hunger Games – real live humans, not just game pieces. In that sense, these small moments of defiance can be very powerful.

The people of Panem, the fictional country of The Hunger Games, also watch lots of reality television, except there's only one show they watch. It's called the Hunger Games. Instead of contestants losing a bunch of weight or marrying a total stranger, the show is about a group of teenagers who (wait for it) kill each other in a fight to the death.

The Hunger Games is a novel about the "haves" and the "have nots" – that is, the people who have money and the people who don't. The Capitol has money. Gobs of it. While the Capitol is wealthier than all of the districts, some districts are more privileged than others, so they can train their tributes to do well in the Hunger Games – a competition they see as a way to gain glory and fame. The poor districts? Well, not much of an advantage there. District 12, Katniss's district, is an impoverished coal mining region that never stands a chance in the Games. They view the Games as a punishment that must be endured – something that robs them of their children. The novel asks you, then, to think about how money can change things for you – and change how you see the world.

In the Hunger Games, each candidate has his or her own set of skills and strengths. There's Cato, who has a crazy temper and can snap someone's neck with his bare hands. There's Foxface, the craftiest girl in the whole game. Oh, and let's not forget little Rue who can jump from tree to tree. And, of course, Peeta is a master of camouflage. Then there's our heroine, Katniss, who is amazing with a bow and arrow. She also has a



rebellious streak a mile wide, one that impresses the Gamemakers during training. Just like in life, everyone has some kind of strength or skill all their own.

The Hunger Games are just full of sacrifices. Katniss makes a huge personal sacrifice when she takes her sister's place in the Hunger Games. She and Peeta sacrifice themselves for each other at the end of the Games when they pop the berries in their mouth. Katniss and Peeta are willing to die together. Or they would have, if the announcer hadn't stopped them. Sacrifices make a big impact because they remind us that human life means something. In a world of reality entertainment like the Hunger Games, that can be a very powerful thing.

"The Hunger Games" are literally an annual competition held each year by the government of Panem to remind all of the districts that rebellion is, um, not a good idea. A tribute is selected from each region (one boy and one girl) and then they're plopped into an arena where the contestants battle to the death. It's kind of like a giant chess game where the Gamemakers move the contestants around with mutant wolves and fireballs and stuff. Basically it's the government's way of showing how much power they have. It's all televised and broadcast on TV with lots of hoopla and spectacle. In the districts, it's required viewing. There's an opening ceremony, interviews, a reunion show and all that, like the Olympics, but deadly.

Katniss's life in District 12 is pretty much a competition to survive against poverty and starvation and hunger. There are no TVs or cameras or winners or losers, so it's not literally a game, but District 12 is very much like the arena. The cruel government controls Katniss and the people of District 12 the same way that the Gamemakers control



her in the arena. So, even though she's not technically playing a game, her whole life is very much a figurative Hunger Games.