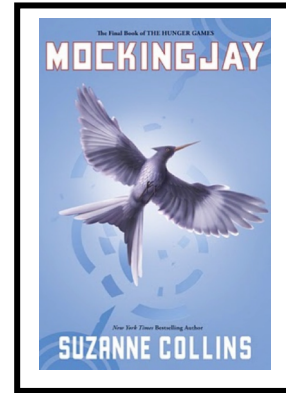
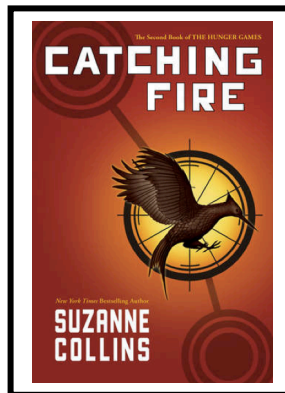
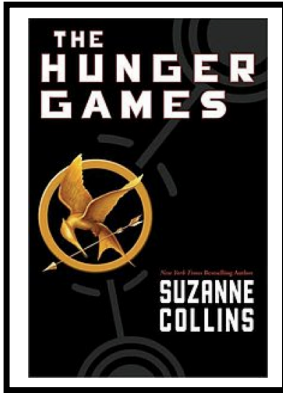
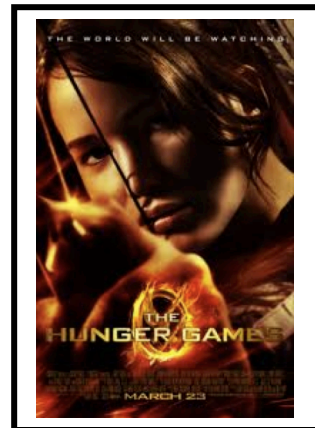


The Hunger Games Trilogy

Parent Book Discussion



The Hunger Games was on *The New York Times* Best Seller list for more than 60 weeks in a row and all three books made the bestseller list for *USA Today* by the end of 2011. Author Suzanne Collins' young adult novels have destroyed the age barrier – readers as young as ten and as old as you can image have devoured these books. As one person wrote, "*The Hunger Games* is addictive, compelling, and completely unputdownable."



These Parent Book Discussion notes were designed to help parents evaluate the material presented in *The Hunger Games* (both the books and movies) to see whether the material and themes would be appropriate for their own children and to help them engage their children and others in meaningful and purposeful discussions using the themes and content of these books and movies as the launching points.

Just because something is popular doesn't mean that your children should read or watch it. However, if you choose to allow your children to read the books or watch the movie, I hope that you'll find these discussion notes valuable. There are dozens of other issues to discuss from these books – the notes that follow are simply the highlights of the issues that hit me as I was reading the books.

Questions to Consider:

1. Should I read or encourage my children to read *The Hunger Games*? Why or why not?
2. If I do allow my children to read *The Hunger Games*, what are the issues/themes that I can discuss with them?

To Read or Not to Read – That is the Question!

Reasons NOT to Read *The Hunger Games*:

- ☐ As one sixth grader put it, “The book just wasn’t that good.”
- ☐ Creating a taste for easy-to-read fiction may result in a young person struggling with reading more difficult literature (and non-fiction) later on.
- ☐ The concept of teenagers killing each other (or being forced to do so) bothers you.
- ☐ There are better books to read and you just don’t have time to add this series.
- ☐ You are too young...
 - While the series is targeted toward the teen audience (12+), there are parts of the book (and movie) that are more intense than some younger teens will appreciate.

Reasons TO Read *The Hunger Games*:

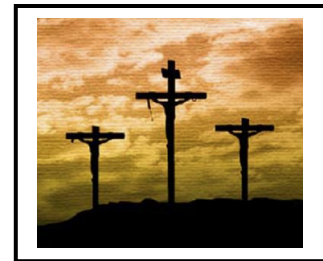
- ☐ Everyone else has read it and you want to engage in conversation and dialogue about the books.
- ☐ You are looking for a fast-paced, easy and interesting read.
- ☐ You are well-read and enjoy a little fiction every once in a while to balance out your reading interests.
- ☐ You are interested in the themes of rebellion from an oppressive government or the story of perseverance and tenacity in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

Major Themes of *The Hunger Games* (trilogy) for Discussion

Book 1 – The Hunger Games

1. Substitutionary Atonement

- ☐ The most important theme of this book, in my opinion, is the concept of substitutionary atonement (or penal substitution).
 - Verses:
 - God made him who had no sin to be sin [or be a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
– 2 Corinthians 5:21
- ☐ Katniss voluntarily takes the place of her sister Primrose as the “tribute” from District 12 – essentially Katniss took the place of Primrose replacing her sister’s life with her own. Compare this story to the story of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. While Katniss is willing to give her own life to protect her younger sister, Jesus was willing to give His life as a ransom for ours...while we were yet sinners – still IN rebellion against His Father! While Prim was young, “innocent” and weak and Katniss was far more skilled and able to defend herself; it was Jesus who was perfect and sinless dying for us!



- Verses:
 - Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:7, 8
- Quotes:
 - The heart of the Gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. – Charles Spurgeon
 - Since Jesus Christ became a substitute for us all, and took upon Himself our sins, that he might bear Gods terrible wrath against sin and expiate our guilt, he necessarily felt the sin of the whole world, together with the entire wrath of God, and afterwards the agony of death on account of this sin. – Martin Luther
 - Let me remind you, it was purely voluntary on the part of Christ. Christ was willing to stand in our stead. – Charles Spurgeon

2. Violence

- The primary complaint aired about *The Hunger Games* (both the books and the movie) related primarily to the violence; and, yes, the books and movie do have a violent theme and depictions. The first question is whether the violence is appropriate or simply gruesome for effect. Both Collins (the author) and those responsible for the movie do a remarkable job of actually restraining the emphasis on the violence. This does not mean that the books and movie are appropriate for all ages – quite to the contrary. But in discussing this concept with your own children you can point out the fact that there are times in human history when people have had to stand up and fight for what they believe in. Engraved into the wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial is the statement, “Freedom is not free.” Katniss lives under an oppressive government and is forced to fight not only to protect herself and those she loves, but in the second and third book she fights for an ideal of something that is greater than just herself. Later we will discuss the ideals of the Founding Fathers of our nation and their decision to throw off an oppressive government agreeing to pledge their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Unlike previous generations, this generation is not as familiar with the cost of freedom born by those who give their lives in service to our nation. *The Hunger Games* reminds us that there are some things that are worth fighting for – and even dying for – meaning there will be a certain level of violence along the way.

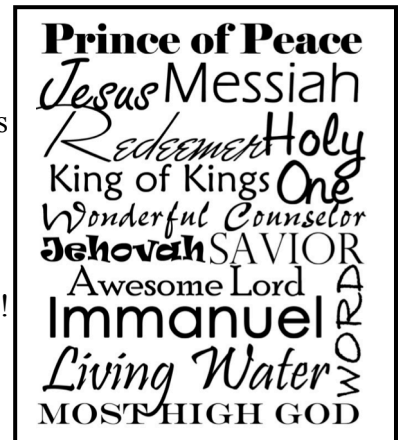


Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again.

~ Ronald Reagan

3. Names have meaning

- One of the interesting aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the names of the characters. It seems that each character has a name that in some manner describes their personality, position or power. I believe this concept can be used as a great segue to a conversation about the importance and meaning of names – including conversations about the Name above all names – Jesus!

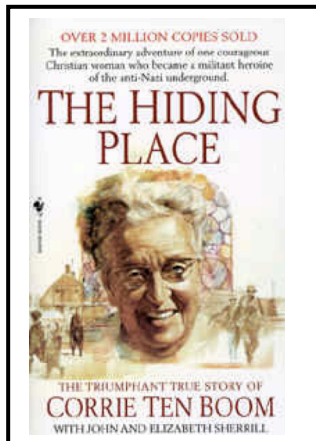


4. Relationships

- Many people compare *The Hunger Games* to another popular teen book series – *Twilight*. There are similarities, the most striking of which is that each series has a female protagonist involved in a love triangle. There are significant differences between Katniss of *The Hunger Games* and Bella of *Twilight* – but the love triangle aspect can lead to healthy conversations about what it means to really love someone, what characteristics are you looking for in a relationship, etc.
 - Activity:
 - Make a list of the character qualities you would like to see evident in the person you would marry. This may sound like an activity for an older teenager or twenty-something, but even younger students can begin to think about character qualities that are valuable in a person.
 - For followers of Jesus Christ, Scripture is clear that you should not be “unequally yoked” or joined together with an unbeliever. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul exclaims clearly, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” In Amos 3:3 it says, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” Be careful who you “walk with” that those friendships do not turn into relationships which lead you away from your first love!
- When talking about the relationship between Katniss and Peeta, you can also discuss the recent phenomenon of “reality TV” and how people act differently when others are watching them! Good questions to ask:
 - Can a person establish a real and lasting relationship based on the time spent on a reality TV program (The Bachelor, etc)?
 - How do you think you’d act differently if there were a camera recording your every word, action, etc.? Do you think this demonstrates a lack of integrity?
 - In the movie *The Hunger Games*, Gale muses that it would be wonderful if everyone just didn’t watch the games. Why do you think our culture is drawn to death and destruction?

5. Ethical Dilemmas

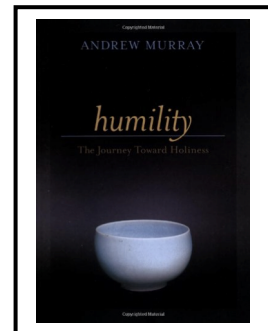
- One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the presentation of numerous ethical dilemmas – questions where you could ask yourself, “What would I do if I were in that situation?”
 - Examples of ethical dilemmas for conversation purposes:
 - Is lying wrong? Is lying always wrong? Would you be willing to lie to protect the life of another person? Would you be willing to lie to save your own life?
 - Obviously Katniss finds herself faced with these fascinating ethical dilemmas and she has choices to make. Whether she is inside the arena fighting for her life or leading a rebellion against President Snow and the oppressive government, Katniss is often faced with the choice of either having to lie or someone (including herself) having to pay the ultimate price of their lives!
 - Is killing wrong? Is killing another person always wrong? Would you be able to kill another person to save the life of someone you loved? Would you be able to take the life of another person to save your own life?



- Again Katniss finds herself faced with these difficult situations. At the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta decide that they would rather die than kill one another – and although Katniss hopes that those in control would rather have two victors than none, the reality is that both Katniss and Peeta take the poisonous berries with the intent of killing themselves.
 - Katniss struggles with this dilemma when she makes an alliance with Rue and when she remembers that Thresh let her live when he could have killed her. Why is it so difficult for Katniss to take the life of another while others in the arena appear to be so cavalier and nonchalant about it?
- If you want to discuss more about ethical dilemmas, I suggest you read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom. Corrie and her family were Dutch Christians who helped hide numerous Jews during WWII. Eventually Corrie and her family were arrested and sent away to concentration camps – her father and sister both died in a concentration camp.
- As Christians we should look to God’s Word for guidance in making decisions about life. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that God’s Word “is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.” Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Wise counsel is also strongly encouraged in Scripture. Proverbs 15:22 says, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

6. How we treat others is important

- There are dozens of examples in the three books that are great launching points to talk about how we should treat others – here are just a couple that caught my attention:
 - Katniss remembers the day that Peeta gave her bread. That scene reminds me of numerous Bible verses that discuss how we ought to treat those less fortunate than we are – here are just a couple:
 - Matthew 25:40 – The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mind, you did for me.”
 - Proverbs 22:22, 23 – Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them.
 - Psalm 41:1 – Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble.
 - Peeta praises Katniss and her hunting ability – this reminds me of the great Proverb that says “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth.” Katniss, while accomplished and skilled with a bow, was very humble when speaking about herself. There is also Proverbs 15:33 which says, “The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.”
 - If you are interested in learning more about the character quality of humility, let me suggest one of my personal favorite authors and books – the title is *Humility* and the author Andrew Murray.
 - Peeta shows kindness to Haymitch by cleaning him up after he had thrown up all over himself. This is a great connection to several Biblical stories of kindness shown to others.
 - Luke 10:25-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan
 - 2 Samuel 9 – the incredible story of King David’s kindness shown to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth
 - Katniss and Gale do not help everyone they encounter – while Katniss is preparing to go into the arena, she encounters a young Avox (slave) whom she recognizes as a young girl that she and Gale had seen running through the woods when they were back in District 12. The young girl was with another person and they were obviously trying to escape – and Katniss and Gale watched as the Capitol captured her. Katniss struggles when she meets this young girl thinking about the good she could have done, but didn’t...and what it might have cost her. Consider that concept in light of the great quote from John Wesley:



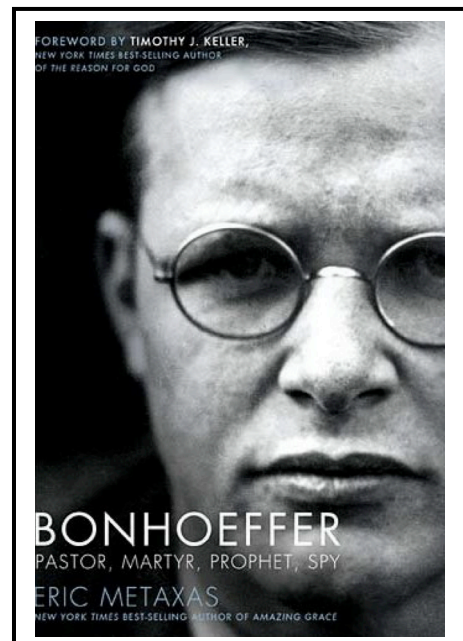
*Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.*

7. The Role of Government vs. The Responsibility of the Person

- The “proper” role of government and the responsibility of a person to oppose the misuse of power will be a theme started in the first book and carried on in the next two books. This is a very important discussion not only for those reading the books, but also for Christians living in our nation today!
 - The first place I would start is an examination from Scripture concerning the proper role of government as well as the proper response to government by the governed. Romans 13 is an excellent place to begin. I would also note that all governments consisting of the rule of man will, in some form and fashion, be corrupt. History has proven this to be true and the Founders of our nation took this concept into consideration when establishing the system of government we have today. Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us.” Our Founders appreciated that only a perfect and holy Being could hold these offices in perfect harmony, so they instituted the separation of powers and the executive, legislative and judicial branches to counter the concept put forth by Lord Acton – that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely! James Madison actually writes about this concept in Federalist #51 with these words:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.

- One person in history that I would more closely examine is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thanks to our good friend and author Eric Metaxas for his recent biography of this incredible martyr and man of God for not only his life and ministry, but also for his stance against the cruel and evil Nazi empire. Far too many young people today don’t know about Bonhoeffer and his involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler.



- The next place I would turn for an examination of a person's proper response to an abusive government would be to the ***Declaration of Independence***. While many people are familiar with a small portion of this amazing document, the more you read the more you'll understand the thoughts that compelled the fifty-six signers to issue this treasonous document. Note the words that these men chose when describing the "absolute Despotism" and the "history of repeated injuries and usurpations" which resulted in "an absolute Tyranny" compelling them to "throw off such Government." Compare these concepts with the description in *The Hunger Games* of the Treaty of Treason which was read to remind the districts of their oppression and how "humiliating and torturous" the actual games were. Imagine what would have happened to the fifty-six signers if the American Revolution were a failure! Here is a portion of the Declaration of Independence for you to consider and discuss:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

- *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* also give us an opportunity to talk about how we should choose to select good leaders and what our criteria should be for these statesmen. My favorite place to turn is actually found in Leviticus 18:21, which records the advice given to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro. Here is the advice given to Moses:
 - But select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials...
 - Qualities of Good Leaders:
 - Capable – able to actually do the job
 - Fear God – understand they will give an account for their lives and have a moral compass to guide their decisions
 - Trustworthy – proven and demonstrated over time, personal life is a reflection of their public life
 - Hate dishonest gain – don't take shortcuts and are willing to help others who want to work hard as well

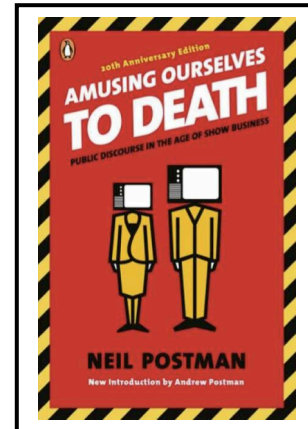
8. The Power of Entertainment/Images

- The Hunger Games themselves can lead to meaningful conversation about how powerful images and entertainment can be.
 - I am reminded of the great line in the movie *Gladiator* by Senator Gracchus talking about the games that Commodus has called for. This is what Gracchus understood about the power and influence of these “games”:

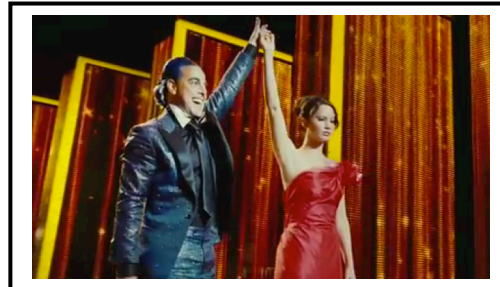
He knows who Rome is. Rome is the mob. He will conjure magic for them and they will be distracted. And he will take their lives. And he will take their freedom. And still they will roar. The beating heart of Rome isn't the marble of the Senate. It's the sand of the Colosseum. He will give them death. And they will love him for it.



- Neil Postman wrote a very powerful book titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In this book, Postman examines the inability of those trapped in the world of entertainment to think critical or profound thoughts. His assessment is that the TV generation has been dumbed down by the constant barrage of images – hours of mindless TV watching and videogame playing have left young people with mush for brains! We don't think critical thoughts simply because after countless hours of mind-numbing TV, we are unable to do so. This idea is also conveyed in the powerful movie *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*.



- Another example from the books about the power of images is how much time, energy and thought go into the presentation of Katniss and Peeta – especially their first time on display at the Capitol. The influence of Cinna and Katniss' prep team in making her not merely presentable, but memorable as the “girl on fire” reminds us how powerful images can be.



9. Other Interesting Discussion Points



- Symbols. There are numerous symbols used in the three books, not the least of which is actually Katniss herself as the Mockingjay, a symbol of rebellion against oppression. The symbolic presentation of her ally Rue surrounded by flowers and the symbolic gesture of thanks and respect to Rue's District 11 for the bread are all profound and meaningful. A discussion about symbols of the past and present would be profound – from symbols of “evil” and the Nazi swastika to symbols of capitalism like the Nike “swoosh” strip, we see symbols every day but don't pay much attention to their influence in our lives.
- Alcohol. You can't talk about Haymitch without talking about the influence of alcohol. As a depressant to drown painful memories, alcohol is an effective and powerful drug. But trying to drown the pain doesn't deal with the reality of it and this can lead to a great discussion about the misleading images and advertising of alcohol so prevalent today.
- Finnick Odair. While Katniss has “remarkably good judgment”, she misjudges Finnick when she first meets him because she “judges the book by its cover.” I think this is a great discussion point to bring in 1 Samuel 16:7 where God reminds Samuel not to do this. “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Great teaching point and reminder to us all!
- Sanctity of Life. Even though these books have a lot of killing in them, there are numerous opportunities to talk about the value of life. Katniss gives Rue a “proper burial” and Thresh doesn't kill Katniss because of how she treated Rue. Taking a life doesn't come easy to Katniss or Peeta – which would make for great conversation about why life has value – is it because of what we do (extrinsic value) or because of who we are (intrinsic value)? Katniss also stops the beating of Gale and the abuse of her “prep team” – other examples of the value of all life.
- At the end of *Mockingjay*, the living tributes are presented with the idea of hosting another Hunger Games, this time using children from the Capitol. The motion carries with Peeta voting against the idea, but Katniss supporting the concept greatly influenced by the loss of her sister Prim during the overthrow of the Capitol. This can lead to a great discussion about how we are to treat our enemies. Paul in his letters to the church in Rome presents a very different picture about vengeance than most people hold – here is what he wrote: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord (Romans 12:18, 19).
 - Learning to forgive is such a difficult concept, but so important not only for the Christian walk, but for a healthy mind – an unwillingness to forgive traps the person in bondage. Jesus tells a great parable about the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18:21-35. To explore more about the importance and power of forgiveness, read *The Bait of Satan* by John Bevere.