

The Hunger Games: An Exaggerated Reflection of American

1498 Words

ENGL 1102 TR 11:00 am – 12:15 pm

Dr. Doug Davis

gives background

[Suzanne Collins has attracted millions of fans—and earned millions of dollars—with her

novel *The Hunger Games*. Full of twists and turns, loss and love, self-discovery, compassion,

introduces prime text

bravery, and the extremely controlling and vile Capital, this futuristic dystopian novel is one that

keeps you entertained and on the edge of your seat until the very last page. When you really

analyze this popular book in depth, it becomes more and more apparent that it is actually a very

thesis

critical mirror image of the culture that has so enthusiastically embraced it. Valerie Frankel, a

scholarly writer, agrees by stating, “Panem with its Hunger Games begins to mirror another

world — ours. This isn’t just a dystopian future; it’s the dystopia of present day America” (49).

quote

Although Panem, in many ways, is unrealistic and strange in its unique and barbaric ways, it is

actually an exaggerated reflection of present day America. The Capital’s obsession with

entertainment and body image, and its cruel and wasteful habits, are not all that different from

our own national vices.

preview supporting points

transition

Panem is a place where location literally controls one’s life. The Capital exhibits

topic

superiority over all the land, resources, and people of the districts and treats everyone in the

districts as if they are disposable and insignificant. The citizens of the Capital have an abundance

of resources and never have to worry about running out of anything, which leads them to be

wasteful, careless, and ungrateful for the luxury items and technological advances that they have.

With bodies “so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they’re grotesque,” it is also very clear

quote

that body image and modification play a significant role in showing that the residents of the Capital are worth more than the poor people of the districts (63). The citizens of Panem's Capital lead a decadent life of leisure and look down upon all those who do not share in their fortune.

Closing sentence

In the districts, however, we find the exact opposite situation. The geographic locations of the districts determine how important they are to the Capitol. In the outlying District 12, for example, people often starve to death due to lack of food and resources (28). People within all the districts are powerless, weak, and bland in appearance compared to the people of the Capitol (59). The Capitol uses its power to dehumanize the residents of the districts by casting their children as pawns in an annual reality television contest that will take all but one contestant's life. All of Panem is forced to watch 24 children fight to the death. This is a form of entertainment for the Capital. It is a source of fear in most of the districts beyond the Capital's borders.

transition

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paraphrases

transition

The world of Panem, although far-fetched, can easily be compared to modern day

link to thesis

America. There are many different ways that *The Hunger Games* are similar to activities that we do nearly every day without realizing it. Shannon Mortimore-Smith's article, "Audience as

topic

'Gamemaker,'" discusses the connection between the Hunger Games and our beloved reality television shows by proving that they both need to have sponsors and an audience that is

summary

interested in the drama to insure that "the games will go on" (159). Another connection between the real world and Collin's novel is established by looking at the prevalence of body

modifications and waste in the Capital. In her article, "Reflection in a Plastic Mirror," Valerie Frankel analyzes the depiction of perfection in the Capitol and the extreme measures its residents go through to achieve it, comparing it to things we do to meet our society's version of perfection.

summary

This forces Katniss and many other tributes in the games to adopt "artificial personas" in hopes

of catching the attention of the audience (52). Frankel also discusses how “gluttonous and wasteful” the Capitol is, especially with food, while people in all the lower districts are starving to death every day (50). This is similar to how reality television stars spend tremendous amounts of money on unnecessary things while many people in our otherwise modern nation are going hungry.

Transition
Topic
link to thesis
Television in particular has a huge influence on Panem’s society much as it has our own.

Millions of Americans regularly tune in to watch their favorite shows and sports. This is extremely similar to the way the Capitol watches the annual Hunger Games. Mortimore-Smith states, “like the Capitol fans who watch the Hunger Games, insulated by their own apathy and far from any ‘real’ danger or consequences, our audiences relish the ruin and humiliation, the unpredictability, and the spectacle that unfold in the lives of their beloved reality television stars” (159). Reality television is heavily scripted and oftentimes the actors must conform to what the audience demands to see, in order to keep being sponsored and produced. The audience wants drama, conflict, and to see these performers’ lives fall apart. None of these things affect them. They like it for the same reason the Capitol does. It’s entertaining. One example of the cruel ways that Americans watch TV is seen the MTV hit series *Teen Mom*. The teen moms who go through the most fights and have the worst attitudes are the ones that are still talked about today. Despite the fact that they have been to jail, rehab, and many other terrible places, people still watch in hopes that their lives—and the lives of their infant children—will get worse. This misfortune is actually sought out by the teen moms, because the more they conform to their audience’s wishes, the more popular they get and the longer their show will last. We see a similar dynamic at work in *The Hunger Games*, especially during the scene when Katniss gave Peeta a kiss while they were in the cave and she was trying to save his life. Soon after, a sponsor

New Point

sent them an item to help them survive the night, and immediately Katniss knew that if she continued to give the audience what it wanted, then she and Peeta would be given more supplies necessary for them to survive (Collins 261). At such a moment, the connection between the Hunger Games and our present day reality television shows is both obvious and eerie.

] close

American television is one of many massive sources of media that have been influencing individuals everywhere to change their images to what is socially acceptable. Americans today are obsessed with appearance. Everywhere you go you see magazines with models that leave the impression in the minds of the young and old that unless you look like them, you are less than perfect. This idea is distributed throughout the Capitol and the districts as well. By practicing cosmetic surgery, tattoos, dying hair more desirable colors, and wearing pounds of makeup that cover every flaw, the Capitol performs many of the same things we do. Frankel agrees by stating that these acts "aren't much more extreme than those of Americans today" (50). In the eyes of the districts, the Capitol looks crazy with their dyed skin and crazy hair with outfits to match. They can't afford these luxury things. To them the Capitol looks "despicable" (Collins 65), but in the Capitol's eyes, it is the people of the districts that look as if they are struggling to overcome "barbarism" (74). Although exaggerated, the Capitol's obsession with appearance mirrors out own.

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More
new
evidence

transition

Not only do the people of the Capitol have different appearances than the ones of the districts, but the amount of food they have is also extremely different. Katniss tried to imagine assembling a meal that was presented to her while she was in the Capitol, but she knew that even if she hunted and gathered materials for days, it would only result in a "poor substitution" of the real thing (65). When she entered the world of Panem, it was like entering an entirely opposite universe. No one in the Capitol went hungry or had to worry about making it through the night.

- topic

They over consumed and wasted food every single day. All of their wasted food could have kept Katniss's district fed for weeks. The Capitol is ungrateful of the things that they have and never have to be scared of it running out. Instead, they stuff their faces with this elegant food that the districts would kill for. Once they are full, they proceeded to inducing vomiting in order for them to eat even more (Frankel 50). In America, these things happen all the time as well. Homeless and poor people go without food every day, while the rich flourish, taking everything they have for granted.

↑ transition

restate argument

Although we don't participate or encourage murder for fun, we do continue watching and encouraging the film industry to produce reality television shows, broadcasting inappropriate behavior and we love every second of it. The dyed skin and other unique trends of the Capitol are more extreme than our beauty regimens today, but we do participate in self-modifying and body enhancing activities to achieve a flawless and desired look, very similar to the way the Capitol does. Like the Capitol and the districts, our modern culture creates both an enormous amount of food and enormous amount of waste while letting the less fortunate go hungry. *The Hunger Games* is a very popular novel because its ideas are considered original and never before seen, but when you really analyze the concepts within, it's clear that this book is an exaggerated model of present day America.

discuss what you have learned