

Model Student

Katniss vs. “Katniss”

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After reading Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* and then watching the film version of the novel, it is clear that the movie doesn’t do the book justice. The main character, Katniss Everdeen, is better rounded in the book, and this is what makes *The Hunger Games* a captivating read. Her character is far too complex for the movie to portray. Her physical characteristics, her friendships, and the many trials such as undergoes in the novel, such as losing her father and becoming her family’s main provider, are what shape Katniss into a victor in the novel. These elements are either only briefly covered in the film or are eliminated from it entirely. In the novel, we learn not only who Katniss is but also *why* she is the way she is. In the film, we barely get to know Katniss at all.

Katniss describes herself in the book by comparing her looks to Gale’s “straight black hair, olive skin, we even have the same grey eyes” (Collins 13). She also describes herself when meeting the other tributes, determining she was one of the smallest. In the film she has red hair, a lighter complexion, and is larger than almost all the other tributes. These changes make the audience empathize less for her. Her red hair in the film is symbolic of her stubborn, daring, and spunky nature, whereas in the book her black hair is not remarkable at all; indeed, it makes her look similar to most of those from her oppressed society, and is thus symbolic of her being tamed

or even controlled. Katniss looks like an underdog in the novel, and this is what makes her rebellion much more impactful in the book as opposed to in the movie. Everyone loves an underdog, but even though President Snow himself calls Katniss an “underdog” in the film, the film itself ironically removes that quality from Katniss. The film takes Collins’s dainty, ordinary Katniss, makes her larger than most of the male tributes, and changes her looks from meek and mild to bold and edgy.

While Katniss is transformed in the film, Madge is entirely removed. Madge’s role in the book helps the reader understand Katniss’s interpersonal relationships. Without her, we don’t get to understand Katniss as a social being. Madge is the daughter of the Mayor and, although poor, never seems to suffer like Katniss. Even though the two girls are from different sides of town, they gravitate towards each other when at school. Katniss describes them both by saying “[s]he keeps to herself, like me....We rarely talk which suits me” (17-18). She also goes on to say that both of them had no friends and merely mutually gravitated towards each other during school. It wasn’t until Madge visits Katniss and gives her the Mockingjay pendant that Katniss realizes they were actually friends. This moment helps the reader understand Katniss better. It shows that she cares about others outside her family; however, she seems to realize the extent of her caring only *after* a dramatic event unfolds. This proves true for her throughout the book with examples such as Rue’s death and even Prim’s cat Buttercup, whom she despised in the beginning but later comes to love in her own way.

Madge is not the only thing left out of the film. Katniss’s childhood is also absent from the film. Her struggles are covered in heartbreaking details in the book. The reader can feel her pain through the descriptive backstory she provides. She describes losing her father in a tragic death and how her mother succumbed to depression in such detail that the reader feels her heart

breaking. The reader learns that the young Katniss did all that she could do to support her family; however, it wasn't enough. Starving in the freezing rain, Katniss describes in detail her painful moment of facing death and how without help from the Baker's boy, Peeta, she would "never have survived" (43). These are strong character development points, and each one makes the reader understand Katniss's life and why she is the tough and distant yet caring person that she is. The movie, however, covers these character-defining moments in only brief flashbacks without any narration. The viewer experiences only a short sadness for Katniss in these moments if she experiences any feelings at all. The viewer is thus unable to relate to or understand Katniss's character in the film.

Katniss is a complex character, and it would likely take much more than two hours for any viewer to get to know and understand her. The film version of *The Hunger Games*, so full of action and fancy costumes, never takes the time to let the audience truly know its protagonist. The viewer of the film will likely spend most of her time badgering Katniss under her breath, unsure about why she is acting the way she is, and unable to connect to the girl on screen like she did in the book. Katniss's physical characteristics, her personality, her interpersonal relationships, and her childhood suffering are all key to understanding who Katniss is and how she became the Victor. Every one of these things is missing from the film, and Katniss remains, in the end, not a relatable heroine but an unsatisfying mystery.