

**“The Hunger Games” by Suzanne Collins . Scholastic Press, 2008. 374 pages**  
**“Catching Fire” by Suzanne Collins. Scholastic Press, 2009. 391 Pages**

Panem , the country that rose from the ashes of North America in the aftermath of a terrible war, is made up of an affluent Capital, located somewhere in the Rocky Mountains, and twelve impoverished districts who provide goods and services for the Capital. The totalitarian Capital rules the Districts, where life is bleak, with an iron fist.

The annual Hunger Games are the Capital’s way of punishing the Districts for their participation in the rebellion. Each District must send two tributes, kids ages twelve to eighteen who are chosen by lottery, to the Capital each year to participate in the Games. Tributes fight to the death in a harsh, treacherous environment. The winner is last one standing. The Games are a huge event, full of ceremony and excitement for the Capital residents. They’re also televised – mandatory viewing for all residents of the Districts.

Sixteen year old Katniss Everdeen of District 12, located in the coal-rich Appalachians, is no stranger to hardship. Since her father’s death in the coal mines when she was eleven, Katniss has been the sole provider for her family. She’s accustomed to fighting for survival. An accomplished hunter, Katniss is skilled with the bow and arrow and well-versed in trapping, foraging and wilderness survival. She keeps food on the table, with enough left over to trade for other necessities.

When Prim, Katniss’ twelve year old sister, is chosen during the Reaping, Katniss steps forward and takes her place. She is sent with Peeta, the local baker’s son, to the Capital to participate in the Games. District 12 hasn’t produced a champion in 24 years.

The Games get off to a bloody and violent start; eleven tributes die in the first few minutes. Katniss relies on her survival skills to outwit her competitors and find food, water and shelter. As the death toll mounts, the gamemakers announce a surprising rule change that forces Katniss to reconsider her strategy in order to survive.

*Catching Fire* picks up the story immediately after *The Hunger Games*.

Katniss’ actions during the Games have made her a political target for the Capital. It’s time for the Reaping again, and Katniss is preparing to escort District 12’s tributes to the Games when an announcement from the gamemakers sends Katniss and other winners back to the arena.

Author Suzanne Collins has given us a picture of a future that bears more than a passing resemblance to Orwell’s Oceania, with a helping of brutality borrowed from Stephen King’s novellas, *The Long Walk* and *The Running Man* thrown in for good measure.

I can’t remember the last time I picked up a book that grabbed me like *The Hunger Games*. Collins has created a gripping, page-turning, and wholly absorbing world peopled by characters I quickly came to care for deeply. I couldn’t stop reading, and I haven’t been able to get the story out of my head. Thankfully, the third – and final – book, *Mockingjay*, comes out Tuesday. I can’t wait to return to Panem!

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