

Teaching Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*
from an Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

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Summary:

Ethics is something that is difficult to work with in school in an approachable manner. The claim of this study is that the novel *The Hunger Games* can serve as help when teaching ethics. There are no guidelines in the National Curriculum as of how to approach ethics yet it states the importance of the subject for students. Reading literature is something that can help make any matter approachable. It allows students to reflect over everyday dilemmas and to challenge their thoughts. The essay discusses reading literature in school and its pedagogical reasons. Further the essay discusses ethics from different points of view and how the ethical dilemmas in *The Hunger Games* can make ethics relatable for students. The final part of the essay consists of a classroom project where students through different tasks and exercises get a chance to discuss everyday ethics and the ethical dilemmas of *The Hunger Games*. This Dystopian novel shows a world where teenagers are forced to participate in a reality TV-show where the only goal is to stay alive by killing all other contestants. Readers get to follow the heroine Katniss in the ethical choices she makes throughout the book and they get an opportunity to reflect on ethics in their most extreme form.

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1. Introduction

I have chosen to write an essay about teaching ethics in school with the help of literature. I have always thought of ethics in terms of rights and wrongs and that the difference between the two is something that just comes naturally. Ethics from that point of view might be that a person behaves according to social rules and obeys the law. I do not have any memory of having worked with ethics in school as a subject or a theme. It was mentioned from time to time but often in connection with a recent theft or another unfortunate incident occurring at the school. The Swedish National Curriculum states the value of ethical work in school under the headline *Fundamental values and tasks of the school*. It states the following:

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in the school should be non-denominational. (Skolverket 9)

This paragraph does not give an idea of how the teacher is supposed to mediate this to students and it does not suggest any methods of working with ethics in an approachable manner. Yet it states that we are to educate students in accordance with certain ethics that derive from Christian tradition; teach them justice, responsibility, tolerance, generosity and so on. What does this mean? Are we as teachers supposed to lecture adolescents about how stealing and lying are wrong and then that is the end of it? I think not. Fjellström states that during a long period of time, all the way into the twentieth century, the Church was in charge of the school in Sweden. Students were to be educated through the values of Christianity and the teachers were obliged to follow those fundamental ideas and values (in Dahlkvist 16). Today the curriculum allows more

interpretation as to how teachers should work with these concepts and there is a great need for the concepts to be made approachable for both students and teachers.

My claim is that it is possible to work with ethics in school in an approachable manner and that the novel *The Hunger Games* can serve as a tool in order to make it interesting for students. *The Hunger Games* which was written by Suzanne Collins (first published in 2008) is a dystopian novel intended for young adults. The subject of ethics and the dystopian novel go well together as the dystopian society is an undesirable world that differs from our own, making it possible to discuss ethics as a concept. The plot of the novel is as follows: Sixteen-year-old Katniss lives with her mother and younger sister Prim in the nation of Panem, a post-apocalyptic America divided into twelve districts and a Capitol. The Capitol is a highly advanced metropolis where President Snow is in charge, while poverty and repression generally characterize the districts. Each year a boy and a girl between the age of twelve and eighteen are chosen from each district by lottery to compete in The Hunger Games. The Hunger Games is a televised competition and reality-show, partly made for the entertainment of the Capitol and partly as retribution for a past rebellion. The show is broadcasted over Panem and the citizens are required to watch. The rules are simple: Kill or be killed, the last girl or boy still alive wins and is allowed to go home to their district where they will bathe in riches. Primrose, Katniss's younger sister is selected as a contestant, but Katniss volunteers in her place. Accordingly she and the boy contestant Peeta are forced to represent District Twelve in the seventy-fourth annual Hunger Games.

My purpose with this essay is to raise the question of how to work with ethics in school and why using *The Hunger Games* can help. In Chapter 2, I will address the pedagogical reasons for reading literature in school. In Chapter 3, I will discuss ethics from different points of view and in connection to the dystopian genre. In Chapter 4, I will show how teachers can work with

ethics in school in the form of a classroom project with methods and exercises that include the entire range of language teaching: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

2. Reading Literature in School - Pedagogical Reasons

Why do we teach literature in school? We obviously want our students to learn something from it, but what? One aspect is that of learning language by reading. In order for students to be able to develop their language skills they need to work with language a little above the level of what they already understand, something Hedge mentions in *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, referring to it as “comprehensible input” (10). She also talks about the positive effects that come from extensive reading. Learners do not only build up their competence for the language but they also become more independent learners, and this builds motivation and confidence for wanting to learn more.

Another reason for using literature in school is for the students to derive some meaning from what they read. In *Teaching Literature* Showalter mentions that a trend in pedagogy for many years has been that students are to reach a certain goal, a clear object if you will. She quotes Professor Wilbert McKeachie who argues against this idea and states that: “the objective of a course is not to cover a certain set of topics, but rather *to facilitate student learning and thinking*” (qtd in Showalter 24). Having a reading project during a course allows students to reflect about and approach literary problems from their own point of view. However, in order for students to engage in their reading the teacher also needs to choose an appropriate text. In *Writing Essays About Literature* Griffith suggests that in order to become an active interpreting reader, we need to connect the work with ourselves. What this idea entails is that the most important meaning that we can receive from literature is the one that can be derived from our own experiences. Griffith does not exclude work from the great authors such as Shakespeare, Virgil or Dickinson. Those are part of our cultural heritage that carries much wisdom and we would be foolish not to cherish it. What Griffith argues for is that “unless we can connect a work of literature to our own experiences and interests, it will not live for us” (7). The way that students can use this mindset when reading is to imagine themselves in the predicaments and

situations the characters are faced with, and most effectively the ones that they cannot really imagine themselves in, and I think that *The Hunger Games* is a book that allows them to do just that. What they need to ask themselves is how they would have reacted in a certain situation, how they would have lived in that society and what their emotional and ethical conflicts would have been?

An additional factor a teacher needs to consider when selecting a book to work with is its popularity, and what positive or negative consequences the choice could mean for the classroom work. *The Hunger Games* is a best seller and has been read all over the world, and especially by young adults. Its popularity can be measured against that of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (Dominus). Collins' book series can be categorized under *popular fiction*. Gelder writes about this concept and he mentions two key words: industry and entertainment (3). According to him, the genre of popular fiction is often criticized for being only a formula, a product of a genre that is far too conventional (43). In spite of this, I do not see genre fiction as a problem. Even though the industry makes a lot of money selling the products that come as a result from the book the main concern should be how it effects the reading tradition among teenagers. However, what could be a problem is the popularity factor. Some students may already have read the book and most of them have probably seen the movie, they might find the idea of working with the book uninteresting. Therefore it will be important for the teacher to emphasize that working with the novel from an ethical point of view will be a beneficial experience and a suitable task for learning English, and hopefully they will see the usefulness of reading and discussing it together with their peers.

3. Teaching Ethics

The field of ethics is something that has been widely researched and there are a number of aspects you could discuss. I will only address the general concept of ethics briefly and instead focus on the role of ethics in school and why *The Hunger Games* is an appropriate novel to use in connection to the subject. I will also discuss the dystopian novel and the positive and negative aspects of that genre.

3.1 What is ethics?

Marshall Gregory writes about ethics and how it influences our lives in *Shaped by Stories*. He explains that everyday we make ethical choices which we may or may not be aware of. We might tell the truth instead of lying, we are fair instead of unfair, we are compassionate and respectful instead of being something else and so it continues. But what is it that makes us act a certain way? From where do we get a sense that a certain behavior is good or bad? In *The Ethics of Teaching*, Strike and Soltis write about two ways to think about ethics. The first one is a consequentialist ethical theory and the idea is that we base our choices on what would benefit and do good to the most amount of people, the best action is the one that overall gets the best results (11). To think from this perspective reminds us that the consequence of an action does not only affect ourselves but everyone. The second ethical theory they mention derives from the German philosopher Kant, and what he proposes is that an ethical action should be judged on whether or not it can be a universal law: “If you are about to apply some moral principle to someone else, are you willing that it be applied to you in the same way?” (15). This idea entails that we treat people the way we expect or wish to be treated ourselves and is referred to as “*the principle of equal respect for persons*”(15). From this perspective you would always have to ask yourself: “If I lie, would I accept being lied to?”

Ethics is something that cannot only be a private matter. In *The Ethical Teacher* Reitz argues that if morality was to become an entirely private affair there would no longer be a personal sense of right and wrong; if a person only has to be responsible to themselves there can be no wrong (In Campbell 16). Campbell adds that our ethical standards are public, “they define what we do to, for, and with one another” (16). From this perspective you could argue that ethics and a sense of right and wrong only exist when we care if our choices affect someone else.

3.2 School and Ethics

Campbell writes that the classroom life for a student is usually their first experience of a social context in civic reality, separated from their family life. Teachers spend time not only on retaining order in their classroom but they also want to develop the students’ tolerance, patience, empathy, responsibility and so on, and a climate of respect for one and other (49). The classroom is a place where students interact with people and where they make their own decisions. Gregory argues that our actions create our *ethical character* and that this character develops and grows constantly; the choices we make on a daily basis just reinforce our own identity (Gregory 23). The word *ethics* itself derives from the Greek word *ethos*, which means character. If the ethical character is something that is always evolving then students should have the opportunity to work with it and in a way that is relatable and interesting to them. The curriculum mentions a number of perspectives that should be established in school and that the ethical perspective “is of importance for many of the issues that are taken up in the school. This perspective should permeate schooling in order to provide a foundation and support pupils in developing their ability to form personal standpoints” (Skolverket 12).

Haydon writes about ethical teaching and points out that a popular demand for schools is to teach students the difference between right and wrong. He argues that this is most unhelpful because we have no idea what teaching right and wrong should entail. It could basically mean

that teachers lay down a set of rules for the students to follow and that would be the end of it. Another concept Haydon argues against is the idea that students not only have to be able to differentiate between right and wrong but that they should care about it as well, that “what is right needs to have some positive motivational weight for them, and what is wrong a negative weight” (56). This still leaves the question, how do we know what is right and what is wrong?

In *The Ethical Teacher* Anthony Weston argues that the idea of ethics is not to moralize over what people should do:

The real point of ethics is to offer some tools for thinking about difficult matters, recognizing from the start – as the very rationale for ethics, in fact – that the world is seldom so simple or clear-cut. Struggle and uncertainty are part of ethics, as they are part of life. (qtd in Campbell 9)

As Weston argues, when working with ethics students get a chance to discuss matters to which there are no answers and in so doing build their own character. It is therefore necessary not to leave the teaching of ethics to chance but to deliberately imply it in the classroom, with commitment and determination, as Campbell argues for in *The Ethical Teacher* (10).

3.3 The Hunger Games and the Dystopian Genre

The main focus in a dystopian novel is how a society is characterized by oppression, suffering and poverty. It often contains aspects that are similar to our own society but these are exaggerated and taken to an extreme. In *Of Blood, Bread and The Hunger Games* Pharr and Clark discuss the characteristics of modern dystopian literature. Its focus is both on a social and a personal change, and the main concern is generally the battle against a totalitarian government or force. The adolescents in the novel are generally the ones who recognize the oppression and the adults are either indoctrinated or ineffectual, which fits well with Katniss’ mother in *The Hunger Games*, Gale and she are the ones providing for their families and all

other adults keep a low profile in fear of the consequences any possible disobedience might have. Pharr and Clark argue that *The Hunger Games* could be read as a postmodern warning of a possible future society that is characterized by fear, violence and misery; but it also provides hope in the form of Katniss, a heroine that could possibly save the society from its dark fate (8-9).

The fact that *The Hunger Games* is a dystopian novel makes the ethical dilemmas even more evident since the world of Panem is a society where people have to endure dreadful things, and where decisions are made based on the ideas of oppression and inequality. It can therefore be a suitable genre to use in school, since it provides a wide range of topics for discussion such as ethics, relationships and criticism of society. However, there may be negative aspects to using these pessimistic visions of the world in class. In an interview, Suzanne Collins has been asked about how people perceive the theme in her book. She answered that some people see it as a take on popularity, *The Hunger Games* as high school, and she says that some protective parents would rather see it as an allegory for adolescence. Collins' own comment to this is: "I don't write about adolescence. I write about war. For adolescents" (Dominus). In *Children's Literature* Reynolds discusses the ethical complexities in connection to texts intended for children. She argues that throughout history adults have used literature to encourage impressionable young readers to think in a certain way or adopt a certain behavior or set of values (112). Further she mentions how critics and adults have wanted to make writers aware of the responsibility they have to remember who their audience is. They argue that those who write for young readers have a duty not to harm them emotionally by imposing a sense of fear in them (113). This is a risk a teacher has to take when working with *The Hunger Games* and the dystopian genre in general; students might derive different meanings from what they read and it might not always be positive experiences. However, I do not think the sensitivity of the subject is a legitimate reason to refrain from working with this novel in class; we should not

underestimate the students capability of discussing these matters, nor deny them the chance of doing it. To prevent negative effects the teacher's responsibility is to maintain a dialogue with the students throughout the process of reading. They need opportunities to discuss the ethical aspects from their point of view; their questions need to be brought to attention and be taken seriously.

3.4 The Hunger Games and Ethics

In *The Hunger Games* the reader follows the main character Katniss closely through first person narration and gets to be a part of the choices she makes. Gregory writes about the ethical power of narratives and that they help us in dealing with everyday problems, feelings we have, values and ideas: "The real problem in life is knowing how to *judge* things [. . .] narratives' ethical visions help us think about it in richer ways than if we had to rely solely on our own firsthand experience" (36). He argues that our firsthand life cannot give us all the knowledge we need in order to handle the complexities of the world. In the National Curriculum there is a chapter called *Fundamental values and tasks of the school* which states different goals. One of these goals is that each pupil "can consciously determine and express ethical standpoints based on knowledge of human rights and basic democratic values, as well as personal experiences" (Skolverket 14). This novel can really play a role when working with ethics in school by forcing students to put on a different set of glasses and really imagine themselves in someone else's situation. Every choice the character makes gives them an opportunity to reflect upon ethical dilemmas.

One major ethical theme in *The Hunger Games* is the nation of Panem itself, a society ruled through dictatorship and oppression. The districts have no power over their own living situation and several of them are in a state of starvation. Under *Fundamental values and tasks of the school* the curriculum states:

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. (Skolverket 9)

Panem is a class-society that goes against all of these values, and this influences the Games and how the contestants approach it. Some of the children from the wealthier districts closest to the Capitol have been trained to play for glory (they are referred to as Careers) and in an organized group they prey on the weaker contestants, systematically killing them off. Katniss is reluctant to the idea of killing; she defends herself but does not often engage in combat by own choice. She feels sympathy for the other contestants trapped in the same nightmare as she is. However, her sympathy does not stretch to the Careers even though they have been forced into this situation just as she has been. The fact that they are socially unequal outside of the arena seems to justify her using violence against them instead of against the contestants from equally poor districts as her own. The question of when it is justified to use violence against someone is an eternal ethical dilemma in our world. The arena where the games take place is an extreme place and the environment affects the contestants, they become different people. Haydon speaks of an ethical environment in *Education, Philosophy and the Ethical Environment* and about the fact that environmental factors make a difference and affect the way people live and think. The physical environment can have effects on a person's ethical thinking, because a certain way of life might not be possible (16). Living life as she does at home is not a possibility for Katniss in the arena even if she wanted to; she therefore makes up her own rules of what she feels is right and wrong in that situation, and for her that is going after the Careers.

Another ethical theme in the novel is the Capitol. It is a superficial metropolis that has every luxury known to man, where appearance is what matters and where the people wear crazy

clothes and make-up and alter their bodies through surgeries to look younger. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games* Frankel argues that the fashions of the Capitol are not much different than those of Americans. She mentions how the Capitol's obsession over looking youthful and she draws connections to our own society and reality-TV:

For those struggling for food and warmth, our garish lipstick, hair dyes, and unnecessary surgeries must seem ridiculous indeed, as we design exotic fashions out of boredom and waste money on luxuries so decadent they're outlandish. Our reality shows are filled with divas obsessing over their hair colors or the source of their next million. (in Pharr & Clark 50)

This is no different from how the people of the poor districts perceive the Capitol. Katniss' perception of them is interesting from an ethical point of view, as she does not see their value as human beings. Their obsession with appearance and looking young is hard for Katniss to grasp. She comes from a place where age is something you earn and respect, and appearance is nothing you can afford to waste time and money on. In the final pages of the book when the games are over and she faces her make-up team again she compares them to animals. She was happy to see them but "in the way one might be glad to see an affectionate trio of pets at the end of a particularly difficult day" (Collins 428-429). She judges their way of living based on their clothes, appearance and conversations, and when referring to them as pets she makes assumptions on the kind of people they are. This can be connected to Haydon's concept of an ethical environment as well. The Capitol and District 12 are two entirely different places, in District 12 they have to struggle to survive and everything else is a low priority. The people of the Capitol however have everything they need and more and therefore they are able to have other priorities, but does that make them bad people? Are the inhabitants of District 12 automatically good people with the "right" priorities as a result from their environment? Are we all just a product of our environment?

Another aspect of ethics is how the Games are made as pure entertainment and how that constantly affect the characters and how they are forced to behave. Prior to the games the contestants are dressed up and expected to behave as if they were competing in a pageant, forcing to act as though they had chosen to compete voluntarily in this game of death. Frankel argues that Katniss has to become an artificial person in order to charm the audience; she is dressed up in order to fit into their superficial world. However, in the end they are charmed by her honesty and lack of artifice, a true and humble heroine who risks her life to save her sister. The audience adores her for who she actually is, in spite of this she will never acknowledge the Capitol people as human beings that are equal to the people she knows from home.

All these ethical aspects found in *The Hunger Games* allow students to imagine themselves in the predicaments and situations the characters are faced with, the ones that they cannot really imagine themselves in and reflect over what their emotional and ethical conflicts might have been. The world of Panem and the world we live in have many similarities and students could surely find aspects in *The Hunger Games* recognizable in our own society.

4. Classroom Project – Methods to Motivate Students

I will start this chapter by introducing methods and ideas for classroom exercises that would benefit the students and their learning. Hedge writes that goals for the reading classroom include applying different reading strategies, interpreting texts meaningfully and developing an awareness of structure in texts. The teacher's responsibility in this context is in fact to design useful and meaningful tasks and activities, thus creating an environment that supports reading and the practicing of reading (205). When it comes to the teaching of values in Swedish schools Dahlkwist argues that if you want students to take an interest in the subject of values it is important to take their point of view in mind and relate the classroom work to the reality that we all live in (39). This is what I would like to include in this project, an opportunity for students to relate the tasks to their own life and experiences. What I have in mind is a teacher that works as an organizer, who creates tasks and opportunities for the students to discuss and reflect about their own reading. Students are going to read and handle texts in different ways and the teacher's job will be to make sure that there is a variety throughout the project.

Hedge argues that in reading tasks today it is standard to use a three-phase procedure consisting of pre-, while-, and post reading stages, this to develop the students' ability to tackle texts. As a pre-reading activity she suggests working with the context of the text in order to let students discuss the topic, previous experiences they might have and familiarize them with the subject. While-reading activities encourage readers to be active readers. Examples of these could be to ask students to make notes, to ask themselves questions or to form ideas about how the story will progress. Post-reading activities make use of what they have read, reactions to the text or activities that are based on the text. Tasks could be role-plays, vocabulary exercises, reading contrasting texts and so on (210). This three-phase procedure will influence this

classroom project. I intend to present examples of tasks and exercises that teach the students all aspects of language learning: reading, writing, speaking and listening and in the same time keep the concept of ethics throughout the project.

I imagine that the project of working with *The Hunger Games* would take about six weeks and I count on there being two English lessons per week. I have structured the classroom project in terms of weeks and each week has its own lesson plans. The project could of course be altered to fit any class; exercises could be adjusted or taken away in order to give the students more time for other tasks, and they could be given more time to read the book in class.

4.1. Week 1- Introduction to Ethics and The Hunger Games

Before commencing a project like this, which stretches over several weeks, it can be useful to have an introduction that will put the students in the right mood or a certain set of mind. Since the purpose of the project is to work with ethics it would therefore be suitable to commence with an introduction on ethics and on ethical dilemmas. The project begins with an introductory task that sets the mood without putting much demand on the students other than the need to discuss. The purpose of the task is for them to speak and argue for their opinions and points of view on the topic of ethical dilemmas, and also to be sensitive to the opinions of their peers.

The students are divided into small groups and all groups are presented with a number of ethical dilemmas, real-life situations of different characters. The group discusses these dilemmas and what they would do if faced with a certain problem. The students are encouraged to discuss what they think they should do and also what they think they in fact would do in the given situation. Each group will have to agree on a way to act in each situation and therefore they will have to argue for their own specific choice of action (See Appendix 1). The lesson finishes with a classroom discussion where all groups present their answers and how they came to that particular conclusion. Alternatively, you could hand out the questions and choose two

students that are to be in favor for acting in a certain way in a dilemma and vice versa; they proceed with arguing why their alternative is the best. What explanations and reasons do they have for making that certain choice?

In the following lesson, students are presented with the project. Many students might be discouraged by the thought of reading a book, and this novel is quite long and it will put demands on them reading in their spare time. In *Literature and Language Teaching* Brumfit and Carter argue that it may not be possible to teach students a true appreciation of literature but that we can be systematic about the principles we operate with. Instead of a student starting to read a book without understanding the conventions and finding the language too difficult it might be better to have an introduction to prepare them and prevent them from putting the book down (23). With this in mind the teacher gives a short introduction on dystopian literature; what it means, what they can expect from such a novel and how it differs from other genres. Then the teacher finds out what the students know about ethics and again finds ethical dilemmas that the whole class can discuss together. It could be stories from real life or from fiction and film; the teacher could even show a short passage from a movie where a character faces an ethical dilemma.

Then they are presented with their task for the coming weeks, reading *The Hunger Games*. While reading, students are encouraged to make notes in the margin or on paper and to reflect on the characters and the choices they make. What makes the characters act the way they do, what reasons do they have? How does Panem differ from your reality and how? Each student gets a little booklet where they are to write up any words they do not understand. They are to find out what the word means and give a short description of it in English. For the following week students are asked to read chapters 1-4.

4.2 Week 2 – Discussion and Close-Reading

Students have now read the first four chapters of the book and they have been introduced to the main characters. Katniss offers herself as Tribute instead of her sister, and the boy selected is Peeta. Chapter 4 ends with their arrival at the Capitol.

In *Teaching Literature in a Second Language* there is a concept called “reduction” which is a phase in teaching literature where the information the students have received so far is made manageable. The book refers to Isenberg who suggests some techniques for arranging information and events, predicting and exploring what happens, whom it happens to and why. One idea presented is to make flowcharts between the characters and the events in the story (Parkinson & Reid 111). During this task the students are to talk about what they have read so far; they work in pairs where they have some questions to discuss. Here are some examples of questions that could serve as material for the discussion and which encourages students to reflect on the ethical dilemmas of the story.

- Discuss the nation of Panem and District 12. What do you find most interesting?
- How is Katniss’ relationship with her mother? What does she say to her before leaving?
- Hunting in the woods is illegal in District 12, why do you think Katniss and Gale do it anyway?
- How does the Reaping work? Do you think it is fair? How does money affect the Reaping?
- Katniss offers herself as tribute to save her sister. What are your thoughts on this?
- Gale says to Katniss that The Hunger Games is basically just hunting. What does he mean? How does Katniss feel about it? How do you feel about it?
- What memory has Katniss of Peeta?

- Katniss says that she thinks a *kind* Peeta is more dangerous than an *unkind* one. What do you think she means by that?
- Why do you think Haymitch behaves like he does?

The purpose of the task is to help the students in processing the text and to hear other people's point of view of events and characters in the plot. The idea is for them to keep ethics in mind throughout the discussion and reflect over the society that is described in the book. The lesson ends with a teacher-led discussion where students can present what they have talked about and where they can ask questions they might have about the text.

During the second lesson the teacher along with the students have a “close-reading” of the first couple of pages of the novel. Only one sentence at a time is shown and after the teacher reads the sentence aloud the class discusses what assumptions one can make about a character, a place or the plot from the sentence and what will come next. This task allows students to practice their oral skills and to develop reading strategies. Scholes proposes a new orientation in terms of literary pedagogy. He argues that the actual *craft* of reading should be the essential thing when teaching more than any particular book. He argues that it will help students realize what power texts have over them (in Showalter 26). With this in mind close reading could be a good idea since students get a chance to reflect on what each sentence says.

4.3 Week 3 – Listening and Speaking

This week the students have read Chapters 5-10, Katniss and Peeta participate in the opening parade of the games and we are introduced to some more characters. They settle in to their luxury home in the Capitol and go through several days of training.

The students will listen to the eleventh chapter on audio book. In *Teaching Literacy* David Wray writes about the audiotape books and how they can serve as great help and motivate the

students. They get to hear a text being read correctly and fluently and it allows them to associate spoken and written language. It enriches vocabulary and word recognition and as they follow along in the book they can interpret and become involved in the story (27). In this chapter the contestants of *The Hunger Games* enter the arena and therefore it could be an interesting part to read like this, together in class.

The next lesson the class is divided into small groups where each group gets a number of quotes or short passages from the chapters they have read on small papers. Each student picks a piece of paper, reads the quote or passage out loud and the group then has to decide who says this or when it occurs in the book and discuss it with the help from some questions written underneath. The idea is that the students get to reflect on how just a short quote or passage can illustrate either a character or a dilemma that this character faces. An example of a passage and how it could look could be:

- The three step back and admire their work. “Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!” (p 76)

Who says this and to whom? What do they mean by it? How would you feel if someone said this to you?

In *Literature in the Language Classroom* Collie and Slater present a number of activities and one is called “Biographical lie-detecting” (27). I have tried this activity myself and it was very much appreciated by the students. I have made some alterations from Collie and Slater’s version; one is to make it a competition which always seems to motivate students. The teacher is supposed to give a short introduction to an author’s life either by oral or written text, or maybe by a video. The students are to work in groups of four or five and compete against each other. Each member of the group receives a sentence with a fact about the author that they read aloud for the rest of the group. One of these sentences is false and they now have to decide

which one. Each group then presents the class with their answers and the teacher reveals the false sentence. The groups who were right get one point. New sets of statements are handed out and so it goes on. There are many interviews in which Suzanne Collins speaks of where she got her inspiration for *The Hunger Games*, so the sentences the students get could be based on that.

For example:

- Suzanne Collins was inspired by her own sister when she wrote about Prim. True or False?
- The idea of *The Hunger Games* came to Suzanne when she was watching footage of the war in Iraq. True or false?
- In Ancient Rome they had competitions similar to *The Hunger Games*. True or false?

4.4 Week 4 – Writing and Experiencing

For this week students have read Chapters 12-16. Katniss and Peeta have been sent into the arena. A fire forces all the contestants closer to each other and Katniss fears that Peeta has joined the Careers (contestants playing the Games for glory). She meets Rue, a little girl from District 11, and they become a team.

This week the students are presented with a writing task. Showalter mentions in *Teaching Literature* that in her fiction course she gives a writing assignment on close reading. She teaches university courses but I think that with some alterations, this assignment could be suitable in the ninth grade as well, especially since they began the introduction of the course with a close reading with the entire class and therefore know how it works (98-99). The students are to choose a page or a short passage in the book that they find interesting and then analyze that passage. They are to analyze the passage from an ethical perspective, and they are helped with some questions. If this does not inspire them they are given the option to write a letter to President Snow:

Find a short passage in *The Hunger Games* that you find interesting. Does the passage involve a certain character? What does the character do/say/feel? Why do you think the character acts/thinks/feels in a certain way? If you were in the same situation as the character, how would you act? Are there any words the character uses you find interesting?

Or

You are a tourist and you have been visiting the nation of Panem. When you return home you find a letter from President Snow. He wants to know how your trip was and what you thought of his nation Panem. What would you like to tell him about Panem? Did you enjoy your trip? What did you see? Did Panem remind you of home or not? Do you have any suggestions for him on how to improve Panem?

The framework for the task is quite loose and it does not need to be long. The purpose is that they practice writing and that they have a chance to reflect over their reading and the nation of Panem and its characters. The following lesson is also dedicated to this project where they can receive help from the teacher and their peers.

At the end of lesson two the class is presented with another short task that is to be done for the following week. Showalter writes about how teachers have used creative ways to dramatize the teaching of fiction. She mentions one teacher with a class reading an eighteenth-century novel. She had the class read a book by candlelight for a short amount of time and to write by the same light as well, afterwards she held a lesson where they discussed the experience (93). I thought of what could dramatize *The Hunger Games*; candlelight would not quite set the appropriate tone. Most parts of the book take place in the woods, so the task is for the students to read the book outside in nature. Perhaps the students can find an area with trees in a park or

maybe sit in an actual forest, lean against a tree and read a few pages, and preferably the teacher would join in the task as well. Ten minutes or more is all they have to do, and the discussion of the entire experience will be held the week after.

4.5 Week 5 – Vocabulary and listening

For this week students have read Chapters 17-20. Katniss and Rue become separated when destroying the careers' food. When Katniss finds her again Rue is killed. Katniss is devastated and wants revenge. The Gamemakers (people who control the arena, weather, fires and so on) come with news, the two remaining tributes get to survive. She reunites with Peeta.

During the first lesson the students get to talk about their outside reading experience. How did they feel reading the book in the same environment where the games take place? Did it affect their perception of the story, if so, in what ways? The students hand in their word booklets to the teacher. The students also hand in their writing tasks, which they will receive response on.

The teacher has checked the wordbooks the students have kept since the beginning of the project, and looked which words keep reappearing in everyone's books. These words have been written down on one paper and the definition of the word on another. The students work in groups of four, or in pairs. The papers are divided between the students, a mix of words and definitions. One student reads the word or definition and the other must find the matching paper, and they take turns to read a word or definition aloud. You could also make this into a Pictionary game.

During the second lesson the class is to have a discussion on how the book has progressed so far, and get some questions to discuss (See Appendix 2). The rest of the time they can use to read the book. There is also a possibility to discuss the students' writing tasks, maybe in small groups or pairs where the students can present the passage they chose and why they chose it.

4.6 Week 6 – End of project

The final week has come and the students have hopefully finished the book, except for the last chapter, which has been saved for the last lesson. If they have not they can still take part in the final discussion of the book, and hopefully they will want to finish the book anyway. Katniss and Peeta are out of the arena and on their way home. Peeta is mad about the fact that Haymitch and Katniss have been deceiving him, even if it was to save him.

This week the students are to do a listening exercise. I browsed on the website “Youtube” and found several interviews with the actors from the movie “The Hunger Games” and also some short interview sessions with Suzanne Collins, the author of the novel (See titles of videos under Bibliography). The actors speak a lot about how they feel about *The Hunger Games* as a story for young adults and how they felt playing their character. In her interview Collins speaks about her inspiration for *The Hunger Games*, what influenced her to write such a novel? The students watch the interviews and take notes at the same time. The videos are very short and they may watch them two times if they want to. After seeing the clips they discuss in pairs and towards the end of the lesson the teacher organizes a class discussion where students can discuss together what the actors were saying. The spoken language itself could also be interesting. Which actors were the hardest to understand and why? Did they speak fast? Did they have an unusual accent?

To end the project the class has a discussion on what they perceive they have been working with these weeks. The teacher reminds them of their first introduction of ethics which was held weeks earlier. How do they see the subject of ethics now? Has their view of it changed? What is their final impression of the book, did they like it or not? Does it send a certain message? They receive a paper with the lesson plan, what they have been doing during all the lessons during the weeks. Each task is discussed and they are able to comment and evaluate the course based on what they liked the most and what things they would have liked to change. This could

also be done on a piece of paper. If there is time it could be nice for the class to watch the movie together and in that way reflect over the past weeks they have spent working with the novel.

5. Conclusion

My purpose with this essay has been to show how you can work with ethics in school in an approachable manner. The National Curriculum states the importance for our students to work with this subject in order to form their own personal standpoints on these matters and in that way build their character. It does not however give any examples of ways to work with ethics in school which is why I found this subject interesting, anything was possible.

In this essay I have discussed the value of reading literature in school and why reading could make the subject of ethics approachable. I myself love to read and I think there is no other task that better challenges your mind and puts yourself in someone else's situation than following characters in a book. I have discussed the concept of ethics in general, in school, in connection to the dystopian genre, ethics in *The Hunger Games*, and why reading this particular book could make the subjects of ethics relatable to students. I have also created a classroom project with the main idea of giving students a chance to discuss ethics in relation to their own life and experiences, where the teacher acts as an organizer who provides meaningful tasks and where the students are the ones who are in charge of the discussion.

My own view of ethics prior to this essay was that ethics are certain rules of conduct and the ability to see the difference between right and wrong, and that such an ability comes naturally as you become an adult. I would not have had any idea on how to work with ethics in a classroom. After having read *The Hunger Games* and after having had a chance to dig further into this subject I have learned that teaching ethics is not about teaching rules or ways of behaving. In *The Hunger Games* we get to follow a heroine who sacrifices her own life for her sister, who kills people when she has to in order to survive and get back to her loved ones, and who has to give up everything that used to be her in order to stay alive. Nowhere in the book

are the readers told how to feel about this, that is something they have to make up for themselves. I would like to once more use the words of Anthony Weston:

The real point of ethics is to offer some tools for thinking about difficult matters, recognizing from the start – as the very rationale for ethics, in fact – that the world is seldom so simple or clear-cut. Struggle and uncertainty are part of ethics, as they are part of life. (qtd in Campbell 9)

There may be teachers that would feel uncomfortable using this book with a class because of the sensitive subjects it brings up. I think that those subjects are the reasons why we should use it. Teaching ethics to students is making them aware that the world we live in is a complicated place where things cannot always be put in categories of right and wrong, good or bad. Ethics is not something that should help them make such a distinction, but something that should allow them to reflect over the choices human beings are faced with everyday. The fact remains that the themes in the book are controversial but we live in a controversial world so why not let our students discuss these ethical issues with their peers and teachers and hopefully get some valuable insights out of it.

APPENDIX 1

Ethical Dilemmas

- You are at the supermarket. When you are paying at the register you notice that the cashier has given you way too much change. Do you tell him?
- Your hairdresser is fully booked for an entire month and you really need a haircut. Is it okay to see someone else?
- You are in a store shopping for new pencils. Suddenly you see a woman grab a bunch of books and calendars from the shelf next to you and stick them in her handbag. She looks around the store suspiciously and walks towards the exit. What would you do?
- You are standing in line at the ATM. When it is finally your turn you discover the man before you has forgot to take his money, 500 SEK. You turn around and see him walking in the opposite direction. What would you do?
- Your brother/sister has left his/her mobile phone at home while out walking the dog. He/She receives a text message. Is it okay to read it?
- You are working as a nurse and your patient Mr. Eriksson is very ill. He becomes very confused and strange during his final hours. He cuts every family member he has out of his will and leaves all his money to a dog kennel for Chihuahuas. Mr. Eriksson asks you to make sure that the news will get to his lawyer, and then he dies. Do you carry out the wishes of Mr. Eriksson?

APPENDIX 2

- When the Tributes are presented in the Capitol, how they look seems to be very important. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think Cinna dressed Katniss and Peeta like that?
- How does Katniss see the people of the Capitol? How does she describe their accent?
- Where would you most like to live, in the Capitol or in District 12? How are they different? Are the people different?
- Do any of Katniss' trainers, designers or prep team really care about her?
- What do you think it would be like to have a whole nation watch you on TV? Would you behave in a different way than you usually do?
- Why do you think it is hard for Katniss to trust Peeta? Why does she trust Rue? How do you know when you can trust a person?
- Katniss often feels that she owes people things for what they have done for her. Can you think of any examples? Why do you think she feels that way? Do you sometimes find it hard to accept gifts from people? Why or why not?
- How does Katniss feel about Gale? About Peeta?
- When Peeta says "I want to die as myself", what do you think he means?
- Why do you think Katniss and Rue become friends so quickly?
- How is Katniss's relationship to Haymitch?
- Do you think that something like the Hunger Games could happen in the future? Has it happened before?

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