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ENGLISH

# Hunger is Not a Game

*Using “The Hunger Games” to Encourage  
Critical Thinking in the ESL Classroom*

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- Abstract:** This essay focuses on the English 6 course for upper secondary school. I have created a book project that includes methods and pedagogical theories both represented in the Swedish school system such as the socio-cultural theory, the cognitive theory and behaviourism as well as less known theory such as critical literacy. The novel I have chosen to work with in this book project is *The Hunger Games*. The lessons are created so they include different reading, writing, speaking and listening activities as required by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket). The aim with this study is to find a method how to bring back students' reading habits and by involving students in critical discussions about characters, events and perspectives in the novel I believe that they will become interested in reading more when they realise that there always is a hidden message behind the simple portraits of the characters and their actions instead of just accepting the way they are or act. The science fiction genre is another way of getting closer to upper secondary students because of its popularity among teenagers. The aim of this book project is creating a life-long learning process for students to develop their English knowledge as well as think more critically about everything that surrounds them.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the international study called PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) from 2009, measuring reading comprehension, mathematic skills and science skills, the Swedish National Agency for Education reports (2010) that a large part of the young population in Sweden reads less and less every year. By presenting a bit different approach for learning a second language by reading books, students will hopefully understand the general purpose of reading books.

Introducing the students to the terms critical thinking and critical literacy (which will be presented further in this essay) will awaken their awareness and eagerness for reading. “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (Macedo and Friere 35). In other words, the more the students know the more they will realise that they want to involve themselves and question different situations and beliefs not only in class but outside the school as well.

In continuation of this chapter I will demonstrate a closer description of the aim of this essay as well as explain the terms that I will use frequently in the rest of this essay.

### 1.1 Aim

In order for the students to gain new knowledge and to maintain a life-long learning process, in this essay I will focus on the novel *The Hunger Games* written by Suzanne Collins. There are a couple of reasons why I chose to work with this particular novel. *The Hunger Games* is classified as a science fiction novel, which means that I choose to take students’ interests and adapt them for educational purpose. *The Hunger Games* is more than just a science fictional story and primarily, my goal is not for the students to read and understand the storyline of the novel but to read beyond the story so they become aware of the reality that surrounds us and affects our lives. Critical literacy is a central term for this study and it will be explained in more detail later in this essay.

### 1.2 Essay question

In order to encourage students to think more critically and see important connections between the fictional and the real world I have decided to create a book project for students in upper secondary school taking the English 6 course. Within this book project I will focus on

awakening students' awareness about global issues such as hunger, child soldiers and involuntary servitude as well as discuss gender portrayal in *The Hunger Games*.

The main research question of this study is:

- ★ What methods can be used when reading *The Hunger Games* in order to encourage critical literacy in the ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom?

For this question to be answered as accurately as possible, in the following chapters my statements and choices will be based on relevant literature.

### 1.3 Method and material

For this book project I will focus on fusing and applying the three major teaching theories: *socio-cultural*, *cognitive* and *behaviourism* (Claesson, 2007). The socio-cultural theory includes working in small groups and developing students' language skills by communicating with each other; the cognitive approach involves learning something new based on the knowledge the students already have and lastly, the behaviouristic teaching theory motivates students in a different and unconscious way by rewarding them for every accomplished assignment (during this book project students will be given points for every accomplished assignment). Even Skolverket suggests that “[t]eaching should be objective and encompass a range of different approaches” (4). For this reason I have decided not to focus on one particular theory/approach but combine the different theories for best result. Although I have chosen to combine the different teaching theories I will mostly focus on the socio-cultural theory because of the beneficial effects it has in second language learning.

As a part of the Swedish *Curriculum for the upper secondary school* we can find that “[s]tudents should develop their ability to take initiatives and responsibility, and to work both independently and together with others” (Skolverket 6). Therefore, during the book project I suggest that students do most of the reading part of the novel at home and on their own. By having follow-ups and different in-class activities where students work with the novel in small groups, they can develop their language skills by listening and learning from each other. In continuation Skolverket suggests that teachers should “take as their starting point that the students are able and willing to take personal responsibility for their learning” (11). Thus, home reading is a kind of constant testing of students' commitment to developing their language skills.

Moreover, Skolverket suggests that "[s]tudents should develop their ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives" (5). In order for students to be able to develop critical thinking I have chosen to work with this particular goal as a main thread throughout the whole project. *Critical thinking* as well as *critical literacy* are the two most important terms for this project. Critical thinking in its general meaning (for educational purposes) involves leading the students to become more aware of the beliefs and thoughts (that rule their society) that they have accepted, in order to be able to analyse and, if necessary, criticize and question them. The second one, *critical literacy* is more relevant for the written word. In other words, students with time will create an analytical and more critical attitude towards the different texts they read needless for the teacher to tell them to do so. The latter will be presented in more detail in chapter 2.2.

Although the critical perspective is the main purpose for this book project we cannot forget that the actual language learning process will be the main focus. This means that during the book project students will learn new words, expressions and gain knowledge at the same time as they develop a critical attitude not only towards the novel, its characters and events but also towards events and happenings in the real world.

## 2. Teaching *The Hunger Games*

The reason I chose to work specifically with *The Hunger Games* in the English classroom is that it is a modern young-adult novel and I think that it is important for the students to be able to relate to the characters in the story. *The Hunger Games* is an action-packed survival story that awakens suspense feelings throughout the whole novel. It is not just a survival story followed by a teenage love story; the novel has also a deeper character that portrays many contemporary global issues.

Beyond the interesting and engaging story, which at the same time is frightening as well, there is an allegory about the political and societal situation we live in. *Allegory*, according to Perrine, is “a narrative or description that has a second meaning beneath the surface one...Allegory has been defined sometimes as an extended metaphor and sometimes as a series of related symbols” (86). Thus, this novel will hopefully awaken students’ awareness about their own position in the world at the same time as it questions their own actions and choices they make on a daily basis in comparison to the actions and events presented in the novel.

In the syllabus for English 6 published by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) it says that teaching the course should cover “living conditions, attitudes, values, traditions, social issues as well as cultural, historical, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used”(7). Now, the novel itself is a dystopian, fictional and future-orientated but many of the events, circumstances and issues problematized in the book are inspired by and based on events, traditions and issues of present-day society.

### 2.1 The science fiction genre and the dystopian novel

Although the genres of science fiction and fantasy overlap and interpenetrate there is a noticeable difference between the two fictional genres. The fantasy fiction portrays mostly magical and physically impossible character abilities and surroundings whereas the genre of science fiction focuses on somewhat realistic environments and human characters with a slight difference of using scientifically improved devices that are not completely unrealistic for the modern scientific development.

There is a countless number of definitions of the genre science fiction but what is common for all of them is that the most common features in most of them are the futuristic or post-apocalyptic environments where the actions and events generally happen, including a lot of improved technological and scientific devices. The core definition I am going to use to define science fiction is written by the science-fiction author Robert A. Heinlein describing science fiction as a "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method"(5).

Pharr and Clark are aware of what the readers expect to read in science-fiction; in their critical essays *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games*, they claim that "most readers also know that science fiction challenges the boundaries of what society perceives as normal and familiar. Often, SF<sup>1</sup> writers present this challenge by remaining the present as a future or alternate reality" (Pharr and Clark 6).

In an article for a news portal<sup>2</sup>, Mary Hallberg explains the popularity of the genre science fiction in young-adult literature with the following statement "Sci-fi and fantasy allow us to escape our world while simultaneously learning something about it. They are grounded in the real world, and if these series didn't strike a nerve beyond magic and fantastical creatures, they wouldn't have been as popular as they have for quite as long". For this reason I have chosen to combine the popularity of the science fiction genre and literature reading in school.

### **Why should we teach science fiction?**

The reason why I have chosen to focus on teaching science fiction is because alternative worlds and imagined societies allow students to question their own way of doing things and to consider more critically their approach to life. Peter Wright and Andy Sawyer's introduction to their book *Teaching Science Fiction* is very appropriate in this context; they explain, "The importance of science fiction to undergraduate literary studies cannot be underestimated. Its capacity to challenge students' social, political and cultural perspectives makes it invaluable in highlighting the contingent nature of contemporary society and the potential for change". In continuation they explain "Sf is a pedagogically exciting, academically rewarding subject that

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to the genre of science-fiction

<sup>2</sup> [www.examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com)



confronts us directly with the possible consequences of universal, planetary, cultural, political, social and personal transformation”.

### **Dystopian novel**

A dystopian novel such as *The Hunger Games* portrays the dark, grim and post-apocalyptic world revealing the greatest fears of that particular society. In this novel, as in many other dystopian novels, the author presents a totalitarian government that tries to suppress and control its citizens with different limitations and punishments. In the case of *The Hunger Games* starvation and poverty is the price that the poor population pay for the luxury and enjoyment of the rich people in the Capitol.

The dystopian novel is one of the most popular genres in modern young adult literature. Speaking of dystopian novel, Wright and Sawyer see a pattern that is repeated in most of the novels of this genre, “Most are concerned with fighting totalitarian governments that only the young adults in the stories recognize as such. Adults are often portrayed as either ineffectual or indoctrinated” (8).

What makes this genre so popular among young adults is the fact that these kinds of stories are so appealing to them in terms of being able to relate to the main characters, such as Katniss, and follow her heroic actions. Wright and Sawyer maintain that these features in stories like *The Hunger Games* make young-adult readers see the light in that dark and hopeless world. “The world of the trilogy projects a possible future of fear, anger, violence, and misery; yet Suzanne Collins also gives that future the possibility of *hope* through the creation of a hero whose job it becomes to redeem the world-even if she does not know it and cannot see it as her fate“ (Wright and Sawyer 9).

## **2.2 Critical Literacy**

A term that I find very important and crucial for this study is *critical literacy*. The term critical literacy is defined as a “pedagogical process of teaching and learning, by which students and teachers interrogate the world, unmask ideological and hegemonic discourses, and frame their actions, in the interest of the larger struggle for social justice” (Darder, Baltodano & Torres 279). Similarly, Simmons defines critical literacy as “a way for students to use their experiences with the world to critique the ideologies supported by the dominant culture and encourage conversations that question the presumed realities of society”(26).

One of Skolverket's many goals is that all students in upper secondary school should develop "ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a view on different issues concerning life and values" (9). Keeping this in mind, I have created a book project that develops the ability of critical thinking whenever the possibility is given during the various in-class activities in the ESL classroom.

The term *critical literacy* can be traced back to the Brazilian lawyer who later became an educator - Paulo Freire (1921-1997). His critical pedagogy says that the teacher should investigate the students' thinking about reality and their action upon reality. Also, he states that the students should develop "thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (Freire 92). "A true dialogue", he claims, "cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking" (Freire 92).

### **2.3 Developing language skills**

As part of a second language learning students should develop four different language skills, namely reading, listening, speaking and writing. According to Hedge these are the most important skills that students should develop while learning a second language. To sum up her discussion; reading should be extensive and critical; listening should give students confidence and get them involved in different situations; speaking should be stimulating; and writing should be creative, purposeful and addressed to the appropriate audience (Hedge 185). During the process of creating the book project presented in chapter 4, these four language skills were taken into consideration and the four different skills are represented in different reading, listening, speaking and writing activities.

### **2.4 Films in the ESL classroom**

Keeping in mind that *The Hunger Games* is quite a long novel (454 pages to be more exact) I have decided to use the film version of the novel as a supplement during the book project. In an article for the *Signal Journal* Amber A. Simmons writes about the advantages teachers have when using films as a complementary resource when reading novels in the ESL classroom. She proposes, "by asking students to 'read' ...beyond the fascinating plot, stunts, and graphics in the movies, we create an opportunity to foster empathy and encourage action in regards to the many injustices of our world"(29). In continuation she explains that pointing

out inequalities in the movies based on fantasy or science-fiction novels can serve as a bridge to identifying the issues in the films/novels and comparing them to the events and issues that happen within their own community. Thus, film sequences will be shown during the book project only to compliment the reading and give the students a visual perspective of what they have just read.

### 3. Analysis

In this chapter I will mostly focus on the themes and issues that I believe are important to be discussed in the ESL classroom. The diversity of elements and topics in *The Hunger Games* gives teachers the opportunity to vary the teaching in so many ways. In the following chapter I will present the three major and global issues: hunger, child soldiers and involuntary servitude as well as discuss the gender perspective of portraying characters in literature.

#### 3.1 Brief summary of *The Hunger Games*

*The Hunger Games* introduces the students to the fictive country of Panem, a country placed in the post-apocalyptic North America where the wealthy district called the Capitol reigns over the remaining 12 poorer districts (states). Living and surviving under the totalitarian government, the citizens of the poorer districts are forced to provide by a lottery system two so-called tributes (one boy and one girl between the ages of 12-18) to participate in a TV show called *The Hunger Games* where adolescents fight to death in an “arena” in order to entertain the citizens of the Capitol. This happening was initiated by past rebellions against the Capitol and for that the 12 poorer districts are punished by creating this brutal TV show. From District 12, Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take her sister's place as tribute and Peeta Mellark is selected as the second tribute.

During the reading, students will follow the preparations of these two and the other twenty-two tributes in the Capitol. Later they will follow their actions and survival skills once the tributes have been placed in the Arena. When in the Arena, Katniss and Peeta pretend to be in love with each other (as suggested by their mentor Haymitch Abernathy - the only living winner of District 12) in order to gain the audience's sympathy and collect sponsorship. The more entertaining they are for the Capitol's citizens the more sponsors tributes get.

Surprisingly, during the games the Gamemakers change the rules of the games and declare that two tributes from the same district can win the games but when only Katniss and Peeta remain in the games the Gamemakers revoke this rule. Instead of turning to kill each other Katniss and Peeta attempt a joint suicide by both eating poisonous berries. Just before they eat the berries, the Gamemakers quickly declare them both victors to avoid having no winner at all. This rebellion against the Capitol will bring its consequences that students can read about in the end of *The Hunger Games* but the real consequences and the continuation of

the Games will be unfolded if students choose to read the second novel of the series called *Catching Fire*.

### 3.2 Theme - Hunger

“How do you feel about the fact that some people take their next meal for granted when so many other people are starving in the world?” (Collins, Interview, 2010). This is a question that the author of the novel, Suzanne Collins, emphasizes during an interview for *Scholastic*. According to Collins this is a question that every reader of her novel should ask herself/himself. How do readers react to this question? What would be a satisfying answer to this question? From this point of view it is almost too obvious that the novel was written for this particular purpose; to develop critical thinking among young readers.

In a survey for the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)* (2012), according to facts, about 870 million people are undernourished and starving in the world. That means that every eighth person is paying the price for the luxury of the western world ignorance.

In another interview, Collins explains the connection between her novel and the present-day issues, that she tries to make her readers aware of, by stating that “the sociopolitical overtones of *The Hunger Games* were very intentionally created to characterize current and past world events, including the use of hunger as a weapon to control populations” (Blasingame 726).

How is the Hunger issue portrayed in the novel, then? Collins central theme in this novel is *hunger*. Every now and then this issue is portrayed in the novel only to remind the reader about the central theme. The main character, Katniss describes this horrific situation in the novel in the following way:

Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Stragglng through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or dying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body. Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one. (Collins 28)

From this extract the reader can get a better picture of the existential difficulties that the citizens of District 12 and the other districts (except for the Capitol, of course) struggle with every day. Katniss realises that people need water and food; people who cannot run to the woods and hunt their daily meals. But she does not let herself get fooled by that. It is too obvious to her and points out the problem of the total ignorance by the government.

Consequently, the starvation as an issue is not what the readers of *The Hunger Games* usually worry about. Instead, they realise how much food in the western world (such as the US and the western-European countries) is thrown on a daily basis. In the article, *Svenskar slänger mat för miljarder*, for the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter (2012), Hedlund argues that Swedish households and grocery stores throw about one million tons of food every year. Showing this article (translated into English, of course) to the students as a part of the ESL learning will make students start thinking wider and see the actions from a critical point of view. Also, this will bring students closer to realising the connection between the issues portrayed in the novel and reality. Lastly, in order to be able to prevent a problem we should first ask ourselves what factors caused this issue to occur in the first place. This activity will be discussed further within the book project presentation.

### 3.3 Theme - Involuntary servitude

Involuntary servitude includes a condition of servitude induced by means of [...] any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that, if the person did not enter into or continue in such condition, that person or another person would suffer serious harm or physical restraint. (U.S. Department of State 25)

Living under the reign of a totalitarian government, as described in *The Hunger Games*, gives the ordinary people living in the poorer districts no choice but serving the country for one and only reason: survival; for themselves and their families.

Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many of whom have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails and the lines of their sunken faces. (Collins 4-5)

There are many victims of involuntary servitude in District 12. Many of those who work in the coal mines are practically forced to work there in order to be able to provide food,

energy and other materials for their families. Receiving unfair wages so that the citizens of the Capitol can continue to live in luxury makes it a typical example of involuntary servitude.

As for the real world, The International Labor Organization (U.S. Department of State 6), reports that more than 12 million people around the world are trapped in different forms of forced labour, from working at a farm to prostitution. Consequently, about 20 billion dollars in wages is stolen from those workers, leaving them in debt servitude or poverty.

### 3.4 Theme - Child soldiers

Forcing children into violent kill-or-be-killed situation is another major theme in “*The Hunger Games*”. The hunger games, as a reality show where 24 tributes from all districts but the Capitol will fight each other to death until one victor remains, were created by the Capitol as punishment for the districts’ past rebellion as well as to remind the districts of the Capitol’s power. This is how the main character Katniss describes the games in the novel:

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. (Collins 22)

In the novel, it has been 74 years since the Capitol created the hunger games. And this year on the 74<sup>th</sup> annual hunger games, Katniss and Peeta are practically forced to participate in a situation where they will have to kill or get killed.

In the real world, an estimated number of 300 000 children, such as Katniss and Peeta, are forced to participate in combat mostly in war areas such as Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Uganda. Who is to be categorised as a child soldier, then?

A child soldier has been defined as a person under the age of 18 who directly or indirectly participates in an armed conflict as part of an armed force or group. While some children wield assault rifles, machetes, or rocket propelled grenades on the front lines, others are used in ‘combat support’ roles as messengers, spies, cooks, mine clearers, porters and sexual slaves. It is not uncommon for them to participate in killing and raping. (UN via Machel, 2000)

In a special report *Impact of armed conflict on children*, UN via Machel (2000) state that hunger, poverty and insecurity are the main reasons for children under the age of 18 to get themselves involved in wars and combat. Being promised to receive regular meals, clothing, medical care and weapons, children often are lured into this horror. The saddest thing is that these child soldiers often experience violence that leaves them physically or psychologically scarred. Making children use drugs and alcohol is not uncommon among child soldiers, mostly to make them feel immortal and fearless on the front line.

### 3.5 Theme – Hero vs. Shero

Gender issues and gender stereotypes are topics that have been discussed very frequently in school debates during the past few years. On one hand, critics, by analysing the majority of fantasy and science fiction novels, realise that “female characters, and women are subjects in male-dominated worlds and are viewed as ‘secondary citizens’” (Melling in Simmons 28). Similarly, Reid writes about female characters’ representation in science fiction novels. She claims that women have always been represented in science fiction novels but most male and female characters usually work side-by-side “accomplishing more as partners than either could separately” (Reid 180).

On the other hand, Reid explains that the characterization of the female in the science fiction novels has changed; “female characters of science fiction or fantasy films have adopted masculine qualities in order to convincingly assume the role of the *shero* [emphasis added]. Typical characteristics include agency, competitiveness, physical toughness, forcefulness, aggressiveness, violence, independence, and rugged individualism” (184). Making the character of Katniss as a *shero* in “The Hunger Games”, the story takes another course and opens up for a different audience. One may think that science fiction novels mostly appeal to male readers but in the case of *The Hunger Games* the story takes a whole other direction by choosing a *shero* to be the bearer of the actions, responsibilities and honour in the novel. Relating to strong female characters in novels, such as Katniss, is a human instinct. In this way adolescent female readers can get involved in the story and get inspired by these strong female characters. But the main questions within this theme are:

- ✓ Who do upper-secondary school students prefer to read about in science fiction novels?
- ✓ What character features get their attention while reading novels? and



- ✓ Who do they easily relate to?

These questions are up for debate in the ESL classroom, which will be explained more closely in the following chapter.

#### 4. The book project

I have decided to work with this novel in form of a book project simply because I, like Hedge, believe that “children do not learn successfully simply by receiving transmitted facts but need to explore new ideas through talk and writing in order to build them into their developing understanding of the world” (362). This book project is created in a way that most of the activities during the process of reading are student-centred so the teacher triggers students’ critical thinking and explorative attitude.

The book project is created in form of series of seventeen episodes so the ESL class can work throughout the novel one episode per week. Each episode presents one English lesson per week of approximately 100 minutes. In Swedish upper-secondary school students taking the English 6 course usually have two lessons per week, 90-100 minutes each. The idea is to work with this novel along with the ordinary English course material so the students can follow a longer learning process. The seventeen episodes in the book project include introduction of the novel; different reading, writing, listening and speaking activities; and a “grand finale” resulting in a minor competition on class level. During this project students will be encouraged to develop critical thinking and work with themes and issues that are presented in the novel on a global level. Furthermore, this project will allow students to work with and develop all four second-language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing.

During the whole process of reading the novel students will be provided with worksheets or have different speaking/writing assignments as well as predict the upcoming actions and twists in the novel. The activities chosen for this book project follow the three phases: pre-, while and post-reading phase, which Hedge explains are crucial for the second language learning. In continuation she explains the benefits that come from this three-phased reading process; the *pre-reading phase* includes different activities that are used in order to activate or develop prior knowledge as well as establish a reason and awaken students’ interest in reading the novel; the *while-reading phase* includes activities that help students to understand the plot and the characters at the same time as they increase their vocabulary; and

the *post-reading phase* includes activities that will help students understand the narrative point of view, prepare students for discussion or interpret the text in a creative way. A lesson plan of one episode (lesson) and how some of the following activities could be used during the book project are presented in appendix 3.

#### 4.1 Pre-reading stage

The most important thing when working with literature in the ESL classroom is the presentation of the novel. For this novel I have decided to introduce it by using some of the pre-reading activities as suggested by Collie and Slater. As introduction, students will be only introduced to the book cover (see appendix 2) and try to figure out what the title or other symbols and elements on the cover say about what kind of story it might be in terms of characters, time and place orientation as well as plot elements (Collie and Slater 17). After the book cover has been discussed the students will listen to an interview with the author where she explains how the idea about the novel was born as well as a brief background of her as an author (Collins, interview, 2010). During this activity students will be provided with worksheet with comprehension questions.

After the detailed analysis of the book cover and after discussing Collins's interview, at the end of the first lesson the students will be introduced to an activity called *Sealing the time capsule* (Collie and Slater 31) where they write a brief summary of what they think is going to happen in the novel. For this activity, the fact the motion picture based on the novel has recently premiered might seem to be a problem. However, the aim with this activity is not to guess the right answer but to inspire the students to be creative and come up with imaginative stories.

During the first reading lesson it is appropriate, if the possibilities allow so, to take the class to an authentic environment (i.e. woods close to the school) and let the students do an *authentic reading* (Showalter) so the students "become oriented to the context of the text" (Hedge 210). In the first chapter of the novel the students will be introduced to the main characters and her occupations besides going to school (i.e. illegally hunting in the woods with her friend). The major part of this chapter is in the woods so this could be a perfect activity for the students to get in the mood and start reading the novel.

## 4.2 While-reading stage

After the introduction of the project, students are now introduced to the main characters, environment and orientation, when and where the actions and events take place. While doing the home reading students are provided with worksheets to make the home reading more engaging and easier to understand the plot progress. As a follow-up from previous lessons, at the beginning of every lesson, the students together with the teacher will go through the worksheets they have been provided with before every home-reading session (including new vocabulary, “choose the statement” exercises and questionnaires), as suggested by Collie and Slater (38). In that way the teacher will have better view of how much the students have understood the opening of the novel and the initial twist. Another type of worksheet could include words and expressions to characterise the text (Collie and Slater 96). This worksheet will help students to get to know the characters on a personal level and distinguish their features as well as learn new characterising words and expressions.

The novel is written in three parts and as each part ends the story comes to a breakpoint where a new twist is revealed. The frequent cliff-hangers just at the end of each chapter motivate students to continue reading. For the students to be able to see the bigger picture of the novel it is appropriate at these points to have some kind of a summarising activity of the whole part 1 of the novel. Creating a worksheet called *Choosing and ordering* (Collie & Slater 139) with 12 events (or key points, important quotes, statements etc.) the teacher gives the students the opportunity to rewind and relive the story so far. The right answer is revealed after the students, in small groups, have finished ordering the 10 correct and most important key points, events and statements.

### ★ Writing activities:

a) Now that the students have been introduced to key elements, facts and characters, they will be asked to write *chapter 0* (Collie and Slater 34) in groups of three students. This activity will make students quicken their imagination and based on the facts that they have collected so far, write a 3-5-paragraphs chapter, which is supposed to be written just before the first paragraph of the novel. For this activity students are allowed to use the facts and information from the worksheets. Just before the end of this lesson the teacher will collect the students' versions of *chapter 0* for assessment of language, vocabulary and creativity. Then the teacher will read the first paragraph of the upcoming chapter only to make students' wonder what will happen next in the novel.

b) Students are introduced to a writing activity called *newspaper article* (Collie and Slater 63). The students are shown a couple of authentic examples of newspaper articles as well as rules and norms for writing an article. In this case the students will be asked to write a newspaper article about “the reaping” with appropriate title, illustration, facts and imaginary interviews from the local witnesses of the reaping in District 12. For this activity it is required to collect facts about the location, characters and other key elements from previous reading. Students will be advised to work in pairs or small groups of three.

c) Based on the notes taken during reading a certain chapter, students in class will be asked to write a brief summary of approximately 80 words. A writing activity that Collie and Slater call *Round Robin* (86) challenges the students to work in groups and write one sentence each to create as complete summary as possible based on the different key points and summaries they have noted. The summaries are later collected for assessment.

d) In order to re-imagine the story from the perspective of a new narrator a writing task is presented. This type of writing activity is much more challenging because the students do not really know what the other characters see, feel or think. On the other hand, this task will challenge their imagination to think of different possible feelings and re-write the story from another point of view. This task is written individually by every student in the class and they are free to choose whose perspective they want to tell the story from (it could be anyone from Prim to Peeta to an anonymous viewer in the Capitol. Furthermore, the students can choose in what format they want to write the new story i.e. letter, poem, diary, Facebook status or Tweeter updates (Altavena and Schulten). This task can be started in class and if they do not finish it in class they can do that at home and hand in the story during the following week. As follow up, the teacher could pick top three of the stories and read them in front of the class. Short discussion about each of them will follow to encourage and give credit to the authors. If the problem of not wanting one student’s story to be read in front of the class occurs, the teacher should respect the student’s choice without this affecting his/her grade.

e) In chapters 17 and 18 in the novel, students will read about Rue’s death. For this event it is appropriate to work with authentic formats such as *writing epitaphs* (Collie and Slater 63) or improvise a speech for her hypothetical funeral (“improvisation activity” in Collie and Slater 76). *Death* is not uncommon in this novel but this particular event draws a lot of attention because of the humanity and the respect Katniss pays for District 11. In that way students are challenged to explore Rue’s (and Katniss’ for that matter) character thoroughly.

f) If there is extra time just before the end of a lesson the students could be introduced to the *acrostic* form of writing a poem “Here, learners are asked to produce poems about the

main characters in the book, so that the first letter of each line, read vertically, spells his [or her] name” (Collie and Slater 124). During the last few minutes, the students can discuss their choice of character

★ Reading activities:

a) Now that the students are introduced to the storyline the book project gets to the main aim, and that is to encourage and support critical literacy in the ESL classroom. There are many different themes in this novel that could be used to discuss in the classroom for this purpose. Global issues, such as hunger, are rarely discussed in the language classroom. Most of the novelists take widely known issues and portray them in their literary works. In order to make them understand the connection between the imaginary world of the novel and our reality students will be provided with articles, reports and studies describing the different global issues as well as extracts from the novel to compare them with. In groups of 4-5 students will be asked to prepare a 5-minute oral presentation of a chosen issue including facts, reasons, consequences, possible solutions and parallels drawn to the novel.

b) On one of the lessons the teacher will want to focus on children’s violence in teenage literature. In groups of three the students will be encouraged to find different passages in the novel where children’s violence is described. Moreover, the students will be encouraged to do parallel reading after being provided with different articles where they can read about different thoughts and opinions about this issue. Subsequently, a *debate* (Collie & Slater 74) will be started where the first half of the class expresses that children’s violence does not affect teenagers negatively whereas the other half claims that teenagers are being damaged by reading about children’s violence. This is another lesson where students’ critical thinking is challenged and developed.

c) The fact that Katniss is the actual female hero of the novel makes the novel quite special compared to the modern hero novels. For that reason, the students will be provided with *parallel reading* of articles, reports or other publications discussing the phenomenon *shero* in comparison to the term *heroine*. Analysing the novel from a gender perspective can give the students another perception of the character creation and the choice of action in the novel that make Suzanne Collins’s story somewhat unique among the other modern young-adult hero novels. After analysing the novel from a gender point of view the students will be asked to write a brief personal opinion of whether they prefer a male or a female hero when reading this kind of novels and describe why they prefer the one or the other. Or if the gender is irrelevant, why is that? They should preferably refer to the parallel reading they have done earlier in the class. A relevant question to ask the students is “What would have been different

if the main character was a male?”. (This activity is mainly for the students to exercise expressing their own opinions about an issue at the same time as the teacher gets the gender perspective clearer when teaching gender sensitive literature in class.)

★ Listening activities:

a) Every now and then during the project, the teacher could create a list of numerous statements where the students are supposed to guess which one of the characters is saying, thinking or feeling the way, as described (Collie and Slater 70). This activity serves as a follow-up activity and it will exercise students’ listening comprehension.

b) It is preferable during the book project that the reading strategy be varied in order for the students to develop different language skills. Active listening activities (Collie and Slater 66) allow the students to listen either to the teacher or recorded version of the novel. At the same time students are provided with worksheets that help them to follow the events by answering simple questions.

★ Speaking activities:

a) As a follow-up from previous home-reading sessions students will be asked to prepare oral group presentations about the different global issues and how they are represented in the novel. Leaving the “child soldier” presentation for last leads us to chapter 6 in the novel, which is about the *Avox*. ” ‘What’s an Avox?’ I ask stupidly. ‘Someone who committed a crime. They cut her tongue so she can’t speak,’ says Haymitch. ‘She’s probably a traitor of some sort’” (Collins 94-95). Parallels could be drawn to the current issues in at least 20 war-related countries mostly on the African continent but also in other parts of the world where nearly 300 000 boys and girls between the ages 9-17 are taken to fight in wars or serve as slaves for those who fight in the war. The English news portal *The Independent*<sup>3</sup> in cooperation with Unicef<sup>4</sup> emphasize the danger of this issue and have worked out a campaign for decreasing the number of child soldiers in the world. This is an excellent parallel reading activity (Collie and Slater 67) for students to realise that freedom should not be taken for granted.

b) As students have read the different publications about the chosen issue they are free to start an open discussion with a little help from the teacher. The oral activity *Discussion based on questionnaires* (Collie and Slater 71) can be used to start up a meaningful discussion. At this point students have been working with several different parallel readings and the statements they will come up with should be based on facts or refer to previous readings.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

<sup>4</sup> [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Again, this conversation will hopefully awaken students' critical thinking and the discussion could end up making students continue thinking about the theme long after the lesson is finished.

c) During previous reading, students are introduced to the creation of genetically engineered organisms such as the tracker-jacker (a poisonous wasp that has the ability to track and sting the enemy and whose venom could result in immediate death or cause heavy hallucinations that mess with one's mind) that are used as weapon against any enemy. One lesson's assignment could be to create such mutations of different animals (draw, name, write mutation features or special skills etc.) or other organisms that could be used in the Arena (see Appendix 1). An oral presentation of each mutation should be prepared and one winning mutation should be selected according to the rules and guidelines in the appendix.

d) During one lesson students will be allowed to get into Ceasar Flickerman's head and create an oral presentation about the most current events that the students have read about as if the students were in the place of Ceasar. Students will be introduced to the oral activity *Television reportage* (Collie and Slater 214) and will be asked to write a brief report of the particular scene. When the groups are ready, the special reports are presented in front of the class or shown as videos if possible. Each group selects one group member to be Ceasar Flickerman plus one more person as co-reporter. This creative activity will challenge the students to work with authentic formats and use their knowledge from the novel to adapt it to the chosen format.

e) Another appreciated activity is the *Chessboard* (Collie & Slater 49) where students label current events in the novel as good or bad and place the good ones on the white squares on the chessboard and the bad ones on the black squares. This activity can be very important at this stage of the project because the students have just finished reading Part 2 in the novel. Note that the teacher or/and the students could choose any other colour they prefer; I took black and white only for a demonstrational purpose. If it is interesting for the class the choice of colour could be discussed in class.

★ Visual activities (listening and writing):

a) As I mentioned earlier in this study, during this book project I will use the motion picture based on the novel. At the beginning of this lesson students are allowed to watch a couple of scenes in the movie (00:49:30-01:08:35). These scenes cover several important events and dialogues that the students have already read. The last scene ends when all the 24 tributes are standing on their platforms in the Arena and the clock counts down the last 60 seconds just before the Games are about to begin.

b) *Star diagram* (Collie and Slater 100): To let students feel like they are a part of *The Hunger Games* they will be asked to individually write down every possible thought, feeling, strategy or sense as if the students were the ones who are just about to kill or be killed (being in Katniss's shoes). After they have come up with as many elements as possible the students will be divided in groups of four to fill in the empty star they will be given from the teacher. Their task will be to categorise all the elements they have thought of into five different categories, one category for each part of the star.

c) After the students have read the chosen chapters, at the beginning of a lesson the students could watch a couple of scenes from the motion picture (01:30:00-01:56:00, *The Hunger Games*). During the time the students watch the movie they will also be asked to answer the questionnaires, tasks and exercises in the worksheet they have been provided with before the movie is shown. This exercise will help students to arouse the critics in themselves while identifying and analysing symbols, themes, issues and details in the movie. This is primarily a visual activity but listening skills are also developed (Collie and Slater 66).

### 4.3 Post-reading stage

The grand finale of this project is structured in a sequence of minor competitions. The first part of the competition is a short follow-up activity called *Team Competition* (Collie and Slater 89). Four teams have been put together randomly in the class and the students answer wide range of questions, i.e. Who said this? How did they win the Hunger Games? as well as discussing the differences between the novel version and the movie version (after they have been shown the final scenes of the motion picture of course). This activity is primarily a listening activity testing students' listening comprehension as well as students' commitment to the novel.

Next step of the competition is an oral activity called *Press Conference* (Collie and Slater 89) where each team has one representative character and the rest of the students are reporters. In this case the teacher is the Press Conference Officer judging if the characters are giving authentic answers so their team can earn any points.

The third step of the competition is another speaking activity called *Just a minute* (Collie and Slater 124). This activity encourages students to speak on a given topic for 60 seconds. In this edited version of this activity, groups of four or five students will share the 60 seconds so each student will have the opportunity to speak for equal amount of time (say



15 seconds for each student). The teams that speak continuously during the 60 seconds will be awarded with points.

The last and final activity will be to prepare an oral presentation for a *theatrical trailer* (Collie & Slater 77). During this activity students are allowed to use any kind of props available at the school to perform or video record an authentic trailer for the movie. Before the start of this activity students will be shown three different trailers of movies they have already seen. At the end of this lesson the best trailer is chosen and the winners of the Hunger Games (after collecting the points of all challenges and tasks) are announced.

A short evaluation of the project is appreciated before this part of the learning process is completed. In this way students will reflect back on the new knowledge they have gained during this learning process. Also, at the end of the book project it will be interesting to unseal the “time capsules” that the students handed in after the first lesson of this project (Collie and Slater 82).

## 5. Conclusion

In the beginning of this study I specified that the aim with this book project would be to bring back students' reading habits by introducing them to a different approach that includes having a critical attitude towards the events and the characters in the novel. This will help students to become curious, analytical, wondering and critical as well as accepting and respecting other students' opinions and beliefs.

I realise that there are many advantages of using the science fiction genre while teaching English. I believe that in this way teachers could take advantage of the popularity of the science fiction novel in order to make the language learning more efficient. The genre of science fiction is also essential for young adults because of its capability to exercise students' imagination. By using a popular literary genre such as science fiction, I tried to come closer to students' interests and consequently (hopefully) raise the odds and encourage students to engage in reading more literature in the future.

It is important to clarify that this book project is only a part of the English 6 course, which means that it covers partly the goals of the course. The remaining goals and parts of the national syllabus for the English 6 course should be covered with other assignments either along with the book project or separately.

The pedagogical methods I chose to work with during this book project are based mostly on Tricia Hedge's book *Teaching and learning in the language classroom* for its socio-cultural perspective on second language learning. Using behaviourism as a pedagogical method (by rewarding students with points for each completed assignment during the book project) motivates students to continue performing good results once they realise that it affects the final grade decision the teacher will make after the book project has been completed. Moreover, I chose to apply the cognitive pedagogical method as part of this project to facilitate and make efficient students' learning process by introducing new knowledge based on facts and situations that they already are familiar with. Also, I would like to note that the methods I have chosen to use in the book project serve only as guidelines which can be used either as a complete book project or combine parts of this project with own ideas.

The purpose of this book project was to encourage students to read literature from a critical point of view. The variety of assignments and in-class activities during the book

project were strategically chosen in order to stimulate and motivate students to engage in reading literature and make the learning process more efficient. The goal is for students' reading habit to increase even outside the ESL classroom. By choosing global issues to discuss while reading the novel I have created a forum for the students to express feelings and thoughts from a more critical point of view. This choice was made in order to encourage students to start thinking critically on a global level. *The Hunger Games* offers many themes and topics to be discussed and analysed in the ESL classroom and that is why I believe that teachers should choose this novel as part of the second language learning.

Finally, I hope that this will serve as inspiration for other teachers to use this or design similar book projects in order to improve students' reading habits and develop critical thinking. The diverse elements in "The Hunger Games" might even inspire teachers to create a school project where all subjects are included and all teachers are involved in the project. Teaching archery in the gym class, calculating probability in the math class, exploring genetically engineered animals in the science class or creating silver parachutes in physics class are only a few suggestions on how this school project would look like.

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## Appendix 1

## HUNGER GAMES MUTTATION CHALLENGE

### MUTTATIONS:

Explore these sites to see animal hybrids people have imagined and created (some pictures are on both sites).

- **Animal Hybrids:** <http://www.hemmy.net/2006/08/29/photoshop-animal-hybrids-galore/>
- **Funny Animal Videos:** <http://www.funnyanimalvideos.com/video/best-photoshop-animal-hybridsOKEPL9iT8Nk.html>

**ACTIVITY:** Invent a mutation that could be used by the Capitol as a weapon (e.g. Jabberjays or Tracker Jackers). Create a poster about your own Capitol mutation (see Ms. Kenney, Mrs. Newman, or Mrs. Williams if you need supplies). Draw or use computer software to create an image of your Capitol mutt. If you are proficient with Adobe Photoshop or other photo editing/design software, you may use it.

### On your mutation poster, include the following details:

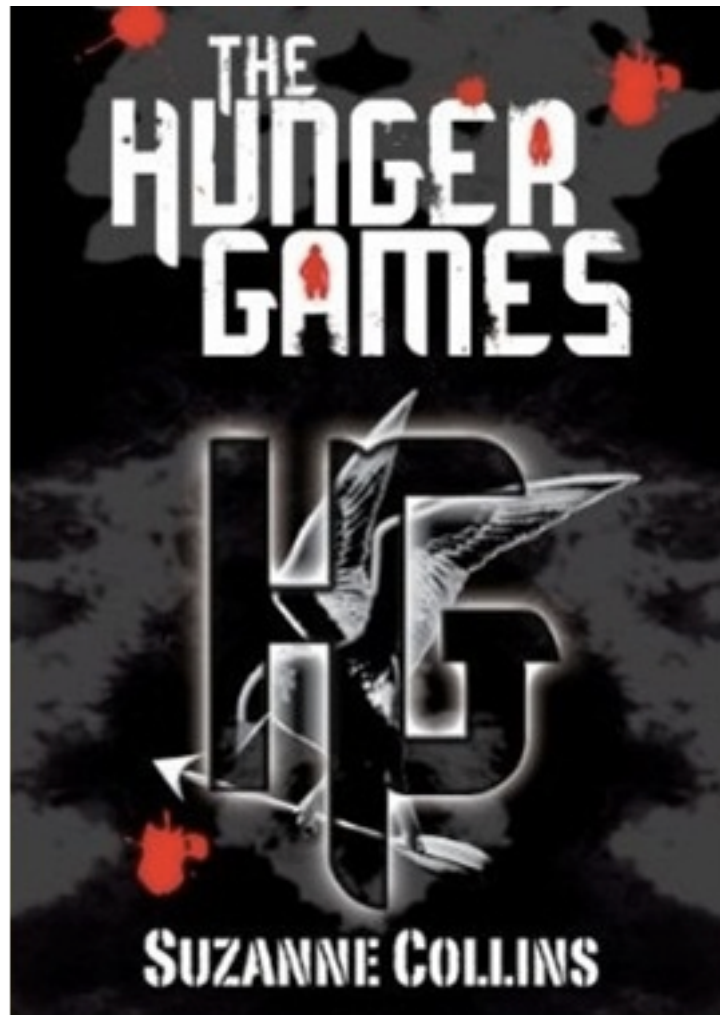
1. A picture of the mutation (drawn or computer generated)
2. Name of mutation
3. Skills/abilities
4. How the Capitol uses it as a weapon (its purpose)
5. *Please put your name on the back of the poster.*

### RUBRIC

	3 points	2 points	1 points
Name of Mutation	So clever, I thought Suzanne Collins wrote it herself. Name implies skills/abilities of its creation	Clever, but no implication of its skills/abilities; OR name implies purpose, but is bland.	Simple name that doesn't tell anything about how it could be used.
Well blended hybrid	Looks like it could jump off the poster and attack us!	Good mashup of parts, but still very clearly two different animals	Looks like one of those "face in the hole" pictures.
Purpose	Devious enough to make President Snow proud and powerful enough to do some damage as a weapon	Devious OR powerful.	Seems about as harmless as a daffodil.
Poster	Well planned layout and easy to read	Well planned OR easy to read.	Zzzzzzz

Orman, Tracee. "Hunger Games Trilogy Capitol Mutts Creative Activity." *TeachersPayTeachers.com - An Open Marketplace for Original Lesson Plans and Other Teaching Resources*. TeachersPayTeachers.com, n.d. Web. 14 March 2012. <<http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Hunger-Games-Trilogy-Capitol-Mutts-Creative-Activity>> .

APPENDIX 2





## APPENDIX 3

### **Episode 3 - The tributes**

Follow-up: Answer the questions from the worksheet in class and discuss the highlights so far in the novel.

Writing activity: Students are introduced to a writing activity called *newspaper article*. The students are shown a couple of authentic examples of newspaper articles as well as rules and norms for writing an article. In this case the students will be asked to write a newspaper article about *the reaping* with appropriate title, illustration, facts and imaginary interviews from the local witnesses of the Reaping in District 12. For this activity it is required to collect facts about the location, characters and other key elements from previous reading. Students will be advised to work in pairs or small groups of three.

Further reading: Home reading pages 40-60 plus worksheet including words and expressions to characterise the text. This worksheet will help students to get to know the characters on a personal level and distinguish their features as well as learn new characterising words and expressions.