

They say it's the new *Twilight*, but better. Have you read *The Hunger Games*?

A literary success

The Hunger Games is a very successful book for young readers by the American author Suzanne Collins. It was published in 2008 and has sold millions of copies around the world. It is the first book for young readers to sell more than a million electronic copies. It has also been translated into 26 different languages. *The Hunger Games* is also now a very successful film. It made 152.5 million dollars in its first weekend in North America alone!

A fight to the death

The story takes place in the future, after the destruction of North America. The country is called Panem. There are twelve poor districts governed by the rich Capitol. The Capitol dominates the nation. Each district has to produce different things for the Capitol. District 12, where the story begins, provides all the coal for the country. There used to be a thirteenth district in the past but they rebelled against the Capitol and were destroyed.

The Hunger Games are an annual event. The Capitol uses them to punish the districts for rebelling. One boy and one girl aged 12 to 18 are chosen from each district to fight in a battle, in which only one person can survive. The chosen teenagers are called 'tributes'. The whole country is forced to watch the games on television.

The heroine is Katniss Everdeen, a 16-year-old girl. Her father worked in the mine but he died in an accident and now she has to provide food for her family. She hunts in the woods around District 12 with her friend Gale, using a bow and arrow. When her younger sister, Prim, is chosen as one of the tributes, Katniss volunteers to go instead. The other tribute from District 12 is a boy named Peeta.

Where did the idea for *The Hunger Games* come from?

One night in 2003, Suzanne Collins was changing between channels on TV. It was at the time of the US invasion of Iraq. The only programmes she could find on TV were 'reality' programmes of young people competing to win a million dollars and news programmes about the war. Suzanne says that the two things started to merge together in her mind and the idea for *The Hunger Games* came to her. She has always found news programmes of wars upsetting. When she was a child, her father was a pilot in the US air force and he fought in Vietnam. It was a very frightening experience for her.

Another important inspiration for the book comes from Suzanne's love of Greek mythology. When she was a child, one of her favourite stories was Theseus and the Minotaur. In this story the city of Athens is ruled by Crete, but the Athenians rebel. As a punishment, Minos, the king of Crete, forces the Athenians to send seven boys and seven girls to Crete every year. The young people are thrown into the labyrinth and eaten by a monster that lives there called the Minotaur. But one of the youths, named Theseus, fights the Minotaur and kills it.

Too much violence?

As *The Hunger Games* has become more popular, some parents in the US have complained about the violence in the book. However, Suzanne says that she was becoming very worried about how much

violence we see on TV nowadays. She wanted to show people where this could end up in the future. She is also concerned about the amount of reality TV we watch. 'We put too much of our lives on TV,' she says. 'And we are becoming desensitised because of this. It's OK not to care about a sitcom, but when it's real tragedy, that's different. It's real life and it's not going to go away when the advertisements come on.' She said that writing about the deaths and violence in the story was the hardest thing for her to do and she hopes it will make people think about what they watch in future.

Brendan Dunne