

# New social order



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BUSTER**

In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, the division in social class is the driving force of the novel. The Capitol creates this illusion of social mobility through the games, which provides a sense of hope to the lower classes. This "illusion" created by the capital serves as a way to keep the lower classes from protesting and revolting against their own government. Due to the capital's corruptness, the chances of winning the games and bringing prosperity back to a district are highly improbable. However, this small fraction of hope given to the people is sufficient enough to maintain social order and keep the power to the Capitol. Through Katniss, the remaining hope in humanity and rebellion is depicted through three major symbols: flames, hunting, and the mockingjay.

The first mark of rebellion in Panem is the introduction of fire and flames as motifs that mark some of Katniss' biggest character development in *The Hunger Games*. When she is first viewed by the Panem elite prior to the Games, she is dressed in clothing that becomes rippled with synthetic flames which was designed by Cinna. Afterwards, she is given the moniker "the girl who was on fire", (40). In this respect, she is viewed as a spectacle or just another form of entertainment by the Panem bourgeoisie. Later in the novel, Cinna calls her by this nickname, referring to her enduring "fiery" spirit in spite of tough challenges. This shatters the view that she is merely a "spectacle" for the crowd and she actually endures beyond the quick laughs and jeers by the crowd. This carries greater significance as a sign that beyond the tyranny of the Capitol, their humiliation and degradation, and the extent to which they destroyed her livelihood, Katniss still prevails over such harsh authority. The fact that her "fire" will never burn out is a looming

reminder to the Capitol that she has sown the seeds of rebellion, and one day, they will be reaped. However, it is evident that her “fiery” dress dims considerably with time, do not emit as many flames as before. This in turn signifies the ability of the Capitol to “dim the flames” of rebellion in order to keep chaos from brewing, yet the threat still exists and looms over the government’s shoulder.

Another, more obvious theme in Katniss’ quest to liberate Panem is her hunting skills, which provides her a position of power among a powerless public. In defense of these skills, Peeta answers Haymitch, who questions her ability, with “My father buys her a squirrel. He always comments on how the arrows never piece the body. She hits each one in the eye,” (21). It is this enduring skill that earns her a level of respect. The more significant instance of her abilities is when her attitude gets the better of her, and she lashes out at the Gamemakers, yet in a way that demonstrates the kind of resilience and tact exemplified by the motif of fire. During the private training session, the Gamemakers become victim to short attention spans and start eating pork, angering Katniss. She loses that signature temperament, and in an instant, she “pulled an arrow and sent it straight at the Gamemakers’ table... The arrow skewers the apple in the pig’s mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief,” (96). In spite of being overtaken by such strong emotion, Katniss manages to maintain her bow-and-arrow talents with the same precision. This signifies the ability of even Panem’s proletariat to calmly yet collectively rebel against the establishment without falling from rash decisions. This, however, still keeps the social order

by the Capitol by ensuring that the struggle is maintained while never escalating to a point that gets unstable.

Another similar symbol of these small defiances in a still stable social order is the mockingjay. The bird is introduced as the remnant of a failed project, which the Capitol uses to spy on the citizens of Panem. For the remainder of *The Hunger Games*, it serves several other meanings as it is assumed as a symbol by Katniss herself. During the Games, she and Rue join forces to defy the systematic killing of their peers, and use the mockingjay to communicate with one another. While this does signify an act of rebellion, it might also be Collins' way of emphasizing that that kind of communication could not exist without the Capitol's attempt to implement it as a system of control.

Essentially, in their communicating with each other, it serves that purpose to an extent. However, after Rue's death, Katniss is provoked by the sight of a mockingjay, as it represents her hatred of the government and its tyranny. This helps cement the conflict between Katniss and the oppressiveness of the Capitol, yet it only helps to reaffirm the Capitol's power structure over the people of Panem by giving their anger no outlet. It is only Katniss who has this outlet.

The prevalence of social order in *The Hunger Games* serves as the looming reminder for Katniss. However, her small acts of defiance, whether they're emblematic of her "fiery" zeal, hunting ability, or link to the mockingjay, will soon bubble over and reach a tipping point of no return. This kind of enduring conflict persists in the entire series, and is even evident in our own political system.