

**Real-World Economic Theory and Fictional Dystopia in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger*
Games Series**

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1.1 Introduction of *The Hunger Games* and Economics

Suzanne Collins is a name many young adults and adults alike recognize rather quickly, as she is the author of the best-selling dystopian young adult series *The Hunger Games*. Scholars have not ignored *The Hunger Games*. In fact, there is a wide range of scholarship surrounding the young adult series. Some literary scholars focus on traditional dystopian aspects of the series such as the fact the series is set in an oppressed futuristic North America with a controlling government at the helm. Other literary scholars focus more on the relationships between characters and their roles in the series, or on the symbolic nature of items such as bread. But literary scholars are not the only ones to provide an analysis of *The Hunger Games*, as economists have found the series useful to showcase economic theories in a way that would capture the attention of their students. What I bring to the discussion is a culmination of these seemingly opposed views: I will enmesh the literary and economic discussions in a way that allows readers to rethink the genre of the dystopian novel with economic theory in mind. I hope to emphasize that an individual does not need to be both an economist and have a PhD in English to understand these varying conversations, and I will do so by implementing fundamental economic theory while also utilizing traditional English avenues of literary discussion to create a space where economics and English work together to define a novel, rather than keeping these disciplines locked in separate scholarly conversations. I do not aim to confuse the reader by implementing more complicated economic subjects such as game theory or econometrics; rather, I hope to emphasize the fact that every person uses economics in their daily lives by utilizing opportunity cost (for example, choosing to spend one's free time watching television at the expense of not using that time to pay bills) or noticing the implications of different work

uniforms as the physical identifiers of specialization of labor (one can tell a doctor from a police officer based off uniform alone). In this thesis I begin my economic discussion with a definition of “economics,” then I delve briefly into different types of economies to pinpoint where Panem lies within this spectrum, followed by a discussion of opportunity cost and scarcity, and finally my last large economic theory that I will discuss is that of specialization of labor. These economic theories will be explained in greater detail through evidence from Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*. I do not want people to simply stop at looking for these principles in Collins’s series; however, as my ultimate goal is for each reader to take these principles with them and apply them more knowledgeably to their everyday lives, and to not simply disregard books such as *The Hunger Games* as a series meant to be taken less seriously than novels such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. There is economic theory in everything, from the supposedly less sophisticated work of Suzanne Collins to deciding what to buy at the grocery store.

Among other aims, this thesis will examine the benefits associated between a better understanding of economic theory and literature that allows one to come to a more concise definition of “dystopia,” and to appreciate the genre on a more fulfilling level. Ha-Joon Chang, in his chapter “Economics, Science Fiction, History and Comparative Studies” in the book *Economic Science Fictions* discusses the positives of having a background in both literature and economics. Much of his chapter is dedicated to developing a relationship between writers and economists, and he writes:

SF [science fiction] writers would benefit from having better knowledge of economics, [but] I would hasten to add that the main beneficiaries from the interaction would be economists. From the beginning, SF has been a very powerful way for us to imagine alternative realities in which very different technologies have changed our institutions

and thereby individuals, forcing us to rethink the assumptions about institutions and individuals that economists take for granted in analyzing the economy. (35)

Although economists would benefit from the imaginative world of science fiction and force economists to not rely on previous assumptions of the economy, this thesis will argue that it is science fiction writers and other members of the English community who would benefit more from a better understanding of economics, not the other way around.

This thesis will bring together literary studies and economic theory to analyze the specialization of labor, the utilization of scarce resources in the Games, the character of Peeta Mellark and the significance of his position as a baker, and the many functions and symbolism of bread in the command economy of *The Hunger Games*. I will analyze particular motifs and symbols that occur throughout the series—with a particular focus on the first book of the trilogy—and how these symbols and events not only hold literary significance, but also have economic significance as well. I will illustrate this by defining “economics” and connecting this concept more specifically to the dystopian novel, I will look at how costumes in the Games are related to specialization, I will examine how the use—and abuse—of scarce resources can allow an outsider to ascertain which district a specific tribute is from, and I will look at the many nuances associated with bread and the role it plays as a resource. These concepts will allow me to illustrate how the dystopian structure of *The Hunger Games* is distinctly defined by economic theories.

Readers of *The Hunger Games* trilogy are transported to a futuristic United States that had fallen to war and other hardships and was rebuilt under the name “Panem.” Panem was divided into thirteen districts, with the Capitol presiding over them all, with President Coriolanus Snow at the helm. During the “Dark Days,” the thirteen districts, led by District Thirteen, fought

back against the oppressive Capitol and, because the districts rebelled, District Thirteen was wiped off the face of the Earth. To reconcile District Thirteen's betrayal of the Capitol, President Snow and some of his closest confidants devised a plan to keep the remaining districts submissive. They created the Hunger Games: a yearly competition in which one boy and one girl—ages 12 through 18—from each district must fight to the death in an arena created by the Capitol's Gamemakers. The sole survivor of each annual Games is awarded riches and given the title of "Victor," and for a year the Victor's district does not have to worry about starving as they are provided extra rations.

The beginning of *The Hunger Games* starts on the cusp of the reaping of the 74th annual Hunger Games: the reaping is the event in which the two tributes from each district are chosen to fight to the death for the entertainment of the citizens of the Capitol. To navigate this dystopian world, Collins has the reader see Panem, and more specifically the injustices of the Hunger Games, through the eyes of Katniss Everdeen, a girl from District Twelve. Katniss is immediately recognized by the reader as the protector of her little sister, Primrose Everdeen. She is also immediately categorized as a dissident of the Capitol's rules, as she provides for his sister and mother by illegally hunting game outside District Twelve's fence. Katniss and Prim, along with all other district children, head to their District square, where the 74th reaping begins. The District Twelve female tribute is chosen, and it is none other than Katniss' little sister, Primrose Everdeen. Katniss volunteers as District Twelve's female tribute, and Peeta Mellark is then chosen as the male tribute from Twelve. They are shipped to the Capitol and are assigned Haymitch Abernathy as their mentor. Katniss and Peeta are at a distinct disadvantage because of their being from District Twelve, and the odds are most certainly not in their favor to win the Games. Their disadvantages will be discussed in further detail within this essay, but I will also

emphasize how Katniss and Peeta actually use their supposed disadvantages to their advantage. Utilizing economic status to their advantage is just one way in which the fictitious country of Panem and its characters are defined by economic theory, and I will discuss in more detail Panem's foundation as it pertains to economic theory in the following section.

2.1 Panem's Economy

Among the academic community, Panem's economy has yet to be formally defined, and so, to begin my discussion on economic theory, the term "economics" will be the first concept I discuss. To delve into this topic, it is useful to understand the basics. Economics, according to Jeffrey Cleveland, Kim Holder, and Brian O'Roark, is "the study of choices made under conditions of scarcity" (153). Scarcity is very prevalent in Collins' series: it shapes relationships, drives the events of the Games, and keeps the districts under the oppressive rule of President Snow. Scarcity, one of the roots of economics, is defined by J. Brian O'Roark in his article, "The odds are never in your favor: Preventing economic growth in *The Hunger Games*" by saying, "Whenever we have a situation where there isn't enough of something to go around, so that all people can have as much as they would like at no charge, economists say there is scarcity" (31). O'Roark then goes on to argue that the way to handle scarcity "revolve[s] around the idea of how goods should be distributed" and these decisions are based off "three key questions: what to produce, how to produce it, and for whom those things should be produced" (O'Roark 31). These questions are answered differently depending on the type of economy of a country. Two very opposing types of economies are free-market economies and command economies. Looking at how both economies answer these production questions will help lay the framework in which we will be able to better define Panem's economy.

In a free-market economy, “the three questions of what, how, and for whom, are decided by individuals with no interference from the government” (O’Roark “The odds” 31). This means that scarcity is solely handled by the people, and the government has no control over the allocation of its resources. Although this would put the power solely in the hands of the people, there are issues that accommodate this lackadaisical type of economic style. O’Roark explains the dangers of this type of economy by saying, “This is not a warm and fuzzy kind of economic system. It is a dog-eat-dog world and you’re wearing Milk Bone underwear” (“The Odds” 31). The people become their own competition, and as will be discussed in more detail through examples from *The Hunger Games*, people can be brutal on their quest for money and power. At the other extreme there is a pure command economy, where:

The questions of what, how, and for whom are answered by government planners. In its purest form, people aren’t free to choose what they want to produce, how or for whom. If you want to be a doctor (a producer of medical services), but the government decides you will be on a gymnastics team, you’d better learn that front handspring (O’Roark, “The odds” 31-32).

The questions of “what, how, and for whom” are answered arguably from a more command perspective in *The Hunger Games* series. In the dystopian world of Panem, all scarce resources are allocated by the Capitol (Cleveland, Holder, and O’Roark, 156) which signifies that Panem is under the rule of a command economy.

2.2 The Clash of Economics and the Dystopian Novel

O’Roark is not the only scholar to notice the significance of how these questions are answered. Amy L. Atchison and Shauna L Shames in their book *Survive and Resist: The*

Definitive Guide to Dystopian Politics, raise this fundamental economic concept when they write that many dystopian books “demonstrate the state’s concern with rules, particularly about who does what and who gets what” (28). The central theme of their research revolves around the genre of the dystopian novel. The authors write, “We hope you enjoy and learn from this book. If it does nothing else, we hope it gives you a greater appreciation for that clumsy but ultimately hopeful system of governance we call democracy, which we argue is the antidote to dystopia” (6). They argue that democracy is the antidote to dystopia, an idea also appearing in Suzanne Collins’ trilogy, as the Capitol presents anything besides a democratic government. Katniss fights and ultimately helps to overthrow the Capitol, and by the end of the third installment, the reader is introduced to more democratic ideals as the dystopian trilogy comes to an end, and Panem’s dystopian tendencies start to recede in favor of a freer mixed economy and government.

We can begin to understand the complexity of both literary works such as *The Hunger Games* and real-world government-controlled economies in the lack of scholarly consensus on how to formally define a country’s economy, and also on how “dystopia” should be defined. According to Justin Scholes and Jon Ostenson in their article “Understanding the Appeal of Dystopian Young Adult Fiction,” dystopia is “a counter to earlier fictional utopias (depictions of idealized societies that promise a glorious future), dystopian fiction instead satirizes utopian ideals or describes societies where negative forces have supremacy.” The “glorious future” that is promised in *The Hunger Games* is the threat that the “Dark Days” will not be repeated, and that the districts will not rebel. This is no glorious future for the vast majority of Panem’s citizens, but this is a very fitting example of a dystopia satirizing “utopian ideals.” Both definitions partially depict how *The Hunger Games* is a dystopian series, but both definitions can be expanded and more thoroughly examined through a better understanding of economic theory.

These authors, on their quest to define “dystopia,” left out an integral factor of this genre: the economic theory driving the plot. The Capitol’s control of the economy through the division of Panem into Twelve Districts is the ultimate factor that causes *The Hunger Games* to be labeled as a dystopia. We need to understand real-world economic theories such as opportunity cost and specialization to fully understand how separating a country into 12 isolated districts causes a dystopian novel to be born, and in turn, grasping these economic concepts will allow for us to gain a better understanding of our own lives.

2.3 Benefits of Understanding Economic Theory

Examining the dilemma of opportunity cost allows us to see the benefits of understanding economic theory, both for analyzing literature such as *The Hunger Games* and in life.

Opportunity cost is the phenomena where an individual must choose which of two options would make them happier, at the cost of the thing they choose to give up. Consider this example: a student chooses to spend one more hour watching television because it is what would make them happiest, but this is at the cost of losing an hour the student could spend studying. Opportunity cost arises since resources are scarce, and in this example, the resource is time. There is a limited amount of time to complete tasks, so the student is unable to do homework and watch television.

To watch television, the student must decide not to study. This is a common, everyday occurrence for all people, and these decisions can range from life-altering to insignificant.

Opportunity cost drives the motivation of many decisions of the characters in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series, and this is an important reflection of real life as well. Decisions based on this pillar of economic theory drive much of the plot of the series, and instances of opportunity cost will be investigated in further detail below.

Another economic concept to be discussed in this thesis is that of specialization of labor. This economic principle without a doubt holds one of the most significant presences within Collins' series. In the real world, says Michael Parkin, "People can produce for themselves all the goods that they can consume, or they can concentrate on producing one good (or perhaps a few goods) and then trade with others—exchange some of their own goods for those of others. Concentrating on the production of only one good or a few goods is called *specialization*" (42). Parkin then goes on to describe the concept of "comparative advantage" which is one way "people gain" (Parkin 42) from a trade. Parkin defines comparative advantage as, "A person has comparative advantage in an activity if that person can perform the activity at a lower opportunity cost than anyone else. Differences in opportunity costs arise from differences in individual abilities and from differences in the characteristics of other resources" (42). In the real world, people naturally tend to do what they are good at doing. If an individual is really good at catching fish but is not as good at mining, that person would rather fish than be a miner because he can produce more goods as a fisherman. This person has a comparative advantage in the fishing industry. This same fisherman also potentially has an absolute advantage over his friend who is a miner if he is able to produce more as a miner than his friend who works in the mines. To break this down, imagine that the fisherman can catch ten fish in an hour while his mining friend can only catch one. Then imagine that the fisherman is also able to produce six pieces of gold for every hour of mining while his miner friend can only produce five pieces of gold in an hour. Due to these production outputs, the fisherman has the absolute advantage in both the fishing and mining industry. To fish, fisherman must give up six pieces of gold so that he can catch his ten fish in one hour. In order to mine, the miner only has to give up one fish to produce five pieces of gold in one hour. According to Parkin, "A person who is more productive than

others has an absolute advantage” (42). Although the fisherman has the absolute advantage in both fields his comparative advantage lies in the fishing industry because he catches more fish in an hour than he can mine pieces of gold, while his mining friend has the comparative advantage in the mining industry because his opportunity cost related to fishing is lower than if he were to mine. Due to comparative advantage, it would make sense for the fisherman to fish and the miner to mine, because even though the fisherman is technically better at both professions than the miner, he is better yet at being a fisherman while the miner produces more goods when he mines. Choosing the field in which each has the comparative advantage would allow both parties to benefit from a trade. Natural specialization of labor causes economic growth and the stimulation of wealth for everyone in part due to these factors since people tend to move towards jobs in which they are more likely to succeed and benefit the most from doing.

However, this specialization of labor, and its resulting economic benefits, do not occur in Collins’ series. The citizens of Panem are forced into a particular field of work based solely on the district in which they were born. Each district produces its own goods (for example, District Four produces seafood while District Twelve is the coal-mining district). There is no mobility or direct trade between districts: a resident of District Twelve could not move to District Four to contribute to the fishing industry even if he is a much better fisherman than a miner. There are a lot of issues with forced specialization of labor and the unnatural separation of groups into specific districts. According to Jeffrey Cleveland, Kim Holder, and Brian O’Roark in “The economics of *The Hunger Games*” the power the Capitol exerts over its districts is the equivalent of “a massive yoke specifically designed and implemented by the Capitol to impose tremendous restrictions and exert control on the day-to-day lives” (162) of its people. Since the Capitol has complete control over these functions of the economy, this leads to economic stagnation and

keeps the districts compliant. Not only does forced specialization contribute to the oppressive, dystopian setting of Panem, but it also plays a significant role in defining the characters of the series and the plot of the books. Understanding the problems associated with forced specialization of labor contributes to a deeper and more fulfilling understanding of Collins' young-adult series from both an English and Economics point-of-view.

3.1 Specialization: Dressing for Success and Acting the Part

Our protagonists are disadvantaged in the Hunger Games due to issues attributed to the constraints of a command economy and forced specialization of labor. Issues caused by this economy include, but are not limited to, the fact that some Districts are always poorer and less favored by the Capitol citizens, and therefore the wealthy are not inclined to help lower districts by sponsoring their tributes since the poorer tributes have less chance to win. Prior to the start of the Games, there are events held by the Capitol to entice citizens to engage with the tributes and become familiar with the players they can later support with gifts during the Games. The first event centers around a parade in which the tributes are to be seen by potential sponsors. Katniss explains:

For the opening ceremonies, you're supposed to wear something that suggests your district's principal industry. District 11, agriculture. District 4, fishing. District 3, factories. This means that coming from District 12, Peeta and I will be in some kind of coal miner's getup. Since the baggy miner's jumpsuits are not particularly becoming, our tributes usually end up in skimpy outfits and hats with headlamps. One year, our tributes were stark naked and covered in black powder to represent coal dust. It's always dreadful and does nothing to win favor with the crowd. (Collins 66)

From the beginning of the Games District Twelve's disadvantage comes from their historically forgettable appearance, which results from tributes being forced to physically characterize themselves based on the work in which they did not choose. Coal is a very dirty, unappealing, and lackluster good, and usually the tributes from District Twelve reflect these attributes. And if the stylists of District Twelve feel that depicting the role of a coal miner is not the best way to turn heads, they have the audacity to make their tributes utterly vulnerable to the nation by forcing them to go naked into the city on the back of a chariot. In these cases, District Twelve tributes are stripped of their identity by not being characterized by their district. Having no identity seems to be preferable to being a coal miner from District Twelve. The "Career" tributes, or in other words, tributes from Districts One, Two, and Four are easily the Capitol favorites due to their proximity to the Capitol and the luxury goods they produce. Katniss also knows that "the best-looking tributes always seem to pull more sponsors" (Collins 58). To start the opening ceremonies:

The tributes from District 1 ride out in a chariot pulled by snow-white horses. They look so beautiful, spray-painted silver, in tasteful tunics glittering with jewels. District 1 makes luxury items for the Capitol. You can hear the roar of the crowd. They are always favorites. (Collins 69)

The crowd reacts to the tributes as people would naturally: an individual would rather go for the piece of gold than the piece of coal. The gold is worth more and with a bar of gold one could buy as much coal as needed plus other things. In the case of picking favorites, it is usually very easy for Capitol sponsors to go for the glittery tributes, as they represent the things the Capitol citizens want, which include luxury, comfort, and a nearly guaranteed victor. The decision to sponsor a "Career" tribute over a small District Twelve girl is an easy one, and this dynamic calls

back to the fundamental principal of opportunity cost: root for the strong, beautiful tributes who are likely to win at the cost of leaving the poorer, weaker tributes to defend for themselves. It's an easy choice for the bloodthirsty citizens of the Capitol who bet on the blood of innocent tributes.

Katniss and Peeta benefit from a new approach by their stylists, who are able to utilize District Twelve's product to make them memorable and attractive to potential sponsors, rather than dusty and poor like District Twelve tributes in the past. Although coal is not very attractive in its original form, the citizens of Panem are forced to remember Katniss and Peeta after being reminded that it is also a very beautiful and dangerous resource after it catches a spark of fire. As bright and glowing tributes, potential sponsors are forced to consider the possibility that this year perhaps the District Twelve tributes have a chance to win the Games, and that sponsoring the tributes from the poorest district would not have as high an opportunity cost as in years past. Katniss' and Peeta's stylists devised a way to create a costume that appeared as if it were on fire. This is meant to symbolize the ember a piece of coal becomes once it is burned. As Katniss and Peeta come into the view of the Capitol citizens in their unique costumes, Katniss notices:

The crowd's initial alarm at our appearance quickly changes to cheers and shouts of 'District Twelve!' Every head is turned our way, pulling the focus from the three chariots ahead of us. At first, I'm frozen, but then I catch sight of us on a large television screen and am floored by how breathtaking we look... The people of the Capitol are going nuts, showering us with flowers, shouting our names, our first names, which they have bothered to find in the program. (Collins 70)

After this memorable debut, Katniss is nicknamed "the girl who was on fire." For the entire series, Katniss and fire are intertwined, and after Katniss and Peeta receive such a positive

response from the crowd, this is the first time she feels “a flicker of hope” (Collins 70). There is the possibility that sponsors may not overlook her in favor of the “career” tributes, and this is literally life changing. The usage of “flicker” is intentional, and this is just one of many times in which Katniss’s emotions resemble that of a burning fire. In many ways, Collins foreshadows Katniss’s character from very early on, and the volatility, unpredictability, and danger that correlate with an uncontrolled fire drive many of her decisions later in the series. Instead of being reduced to the low monetary value of what District Twelve is forced to produce, Katniss is represented as an unforgettable individual. She symbolizes the potential power each district may have if they fight the Capitol and overcome the oppressive nature of the iron hand the Capitol uses to choke the districts into submission and destitution.

3.2 The Use and Abuse of Natural Resources

In this section, I will examine the attitudes and actions of characters based on their dependency of the Capitol, and the reliability of scarce resources for various districts. As will be proven in this section, the advantages given to the Career tributes earlier in their lives, such as having access to food and training, becomes a huge disadvantage when thrown into the Games. The Career tributes are dependent on the food and resource supply provided by the Gamemakers in the beginning of the Games in what is known as the “Cornucopia.” In a sense, the Career tributes are house pets of the Capitol, and tributes such as Katniss are wild animals left to fend for themselves from a young age. When a house pet is thrown into the wilderness, it does not know how to fend for itself, and Katniss utilizes this weakness in a very clever way which will be discussed below.

All tributes are given the same outfit to endure the arena, and while this adds more obscurity to the origins of a tribute, by looking at how each tribute acts in the arena, it is not

difficult to approximate which District a tribute is from. Just prior to the Games beginning, the stylist Cinna helps Katniss prepare. He “does my hair in my simple trademark braid down my back. Then the clothes arrive, the same for every tribute... simple tawny pants, light green blouse, sturdy brown belt, and thin, hooded black jacket that falls to my thighs” (Collins 145). All 24 tributes are dressed in the same outfit. There are no shiny adornments for the District One tributes, no coal dust for District Twelve, everyone wears an identical uniform. Besides the physical characteristics of the tributes, it is not easy to identify a tribute’s home district at first glance. Arguably, a viewer tuning into the Games with no prior knowledge of the tributes (for example, they did not know that Katniss with her “trademark braid” was the female tribute from District Twelve) would be able to identify where each tribute was from based on their use—and abuse—of natural resources in the arena.

At the start of each Game, the tributes are lined up in a circle around the Cornucopia. According to Katniss, the mouth of the Cornucopia is:

Spilling over with the things that will give us life in the arena. Food, containers of water, weapons, medicine, garments, fire starters. Strewn around the Cornucopia are other supplies, their value decreasing the farther they are from the horn. For instance, only a few steps from my feet lies a three-foot square of plastic. Certainly it could be of some use in a downpour. But there in the mouth. I can see a tent pack that would protect from almost any sort of weather. If I had the guts to go in and fight for it against twenty-three other tributes. Which I have been instructed not to do. (Collins 148)

For many poorer districts, the plan is to turn away from the Cornucopia and run to avoid the initial bloodshed. In fact, Haymitch directly instructed both Katniss and Peeta to avoid the fighting for supplies and run immediately toward a water source. In Katniss’s mind at this

moment; however, she is weighing her options, and in this instance her opportunity cost of going for the potentially lifesaving resources could mean her untimely death. Katniss compares two different goods: the sheet of plastic by her feet and the tent pack lying far away from her in the mouth of the Cornucopia and realizes that the good farther away is no doubt the superior good. Although it cannot be proven, it is likely the other tributes are analyzing the resources before them in a similar manner. Inevitably, many tributes go for the goods such as the tent pack rather than the sheet of plastic, and this causes the gruesome initial bloodshed that claims the lives of eleven tributes. Katniss explains that “On the opening day, they don’t even fire the cannons until the initial fighting’s over because it’s too hard to keep track of the fatalities” (Collins 152). The Gamemakers manipulate the human right of choice by strategically placing better resources farther away. The initial bloodshed weeds out the weak, and usually the dead on the first day are tributes from poorer districts. The Career Tributes historically control the Cornucopia, and this is one of the ways in which a Career Tribute usually wins the Games. They are not scared to go to the mouth of the Cornucopia because they are stronger, bred for battle, and are fighting for honor and glory rather than to stay alive.

As the Games continue, readers develop a better understanding of how citizens of poorer districts, and more specifically Katniss, overcome the likely death sentence of starvation through her careful use of scarce resources. One example of Katniss illustrating her poorer upbringing is after she is scorched by a fireball and must take note of what supplies remain intact. Katniss sees that her sleeping bag is not too badly damaged, but notes “My jacket is another matter. Stinking and scorched, at least a foot of the back beyond repair. I cut off the damaged area leaving me with a garment that comes just to the bottom of my ribs. But the hood’s intact and it’s far better than nothing” (Collins 180). Every scrap of material that Katniss can keep, she does so

gratefully. In a sense, the jacket, which initially was part of the identical uniform each tribute was given prior to the Games, becomes a symbol of differentiation between Katniss and other remaining tributes. The girl who was on fire saved the remainder of her smoldering jacket instead of tossing it aside. Katniss eagerly wears the salvageable part of her uniform rather than discarding it, and this sets her apart from the Career Tributes who would have thrown the burned jacket aside for new clothes from the Cornucopia. She does not throw anything away and takes care to not go through her rations too quickly. She “nibbles” (Collins 180) on a cracker rather than eating the whole thing in a single bite, and this was conditioned into her by her upbringing and the constant fear of succumbing to starvation in District Twelve. She never knew when her next meal would come growing up in District Twelve, and if she had not have learned how to hunt, she could have very easily starved. While recovering from her burns, Katniss takes the time to “neatly” arrange her supplies (Collins 180). Not only does Katniss ration her supplies, but she arranges them neatly and orderly, because she knows that what is in her backpack is all that she has in the arena. She does not disrespect the little she has by throwing her resources haphazardly into her bag.

While Katniss grew up fearing hunger, the Career Tributes seem to have had a very different upbringing, which leads them to squander resources and fail to assess the consequences of their actions by packing poorly for their missions and relying too heavily on the continued assistance of the Capitol through the resources in the Cornucopia. When Katniss first sees all the tributes for the 74th Games she notes, “Almost all of the boys and at least half of the girls are bigger than I am, even though many of the tributes have never been fed properly... The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment. The tributes from 1, 2, and 4 traditionally

have this look about them” (Collins 94). The Career Tributes have very clearly never had to worry about food, and they are fit while many of the other tributes are malnourished. Although initially the size and upbringing of the Career Tributes is unsettling, Katniss eventually uses their coddled status as Capitol pets to her advantage in the arena. While Katniss and Rue think of a way to go on the offensive against the remaining Career Tributes, Katniss realizes:

Somehow Rue and I must find a way to destroy their food. I’m pretty sure feeding themselves will be a tremendous struggle. Traditionally, the Career tribute’s strategy is to get hold of all the food early on and work from there. The years when they have not protected it well—one year a pack of hideous reptiles destroyed it, another a Gamemaker’s flood washed it away—those are usually the years that tributes from other districts have won. That the Careers have been better fed growing up is actually to their disadvantage, because they don’t know how to be hungry. Not the way Rue and I do.
(Collins 208)

Understanding how to be hungry and not having everything thrown at her feet allows Katniss the advantage of not relying on the Capitol. By leaving Katniss to fend for herself in poor District Twelve, the Capitol actually allowed her the opportunity to gain independence and freedom from its controlling hand. Katniss learned how to use her scarce resources wisely, as was emphasized by her refusal to discard her jacket even after a large portion of it had been burned. Katniss does not expect anything from the Capitol and knows that she is basically on her own in the arena, so she uses the control and discipline she learned from her time in District Twelve to guide her through the arena. Even if Katniss snared three bunnies in one day, she would not eat all three in one sitting. She rations her supplies because she does not expect three more bunnies to neatly fall into her lap. Her mentality is drastically different from that of the Careers, who do not know how

to fend for themselves by foraging and hunting the way Rue and Katniss do, because they have never had to provide their own resources. The Careers are crippled by their dependence of the Capitol, and Katniss exploits this weakness by blowing up the Cornucopia.

Katniss's destruction of Career supplies is immediately proven to have been an excellent strategy, as the opportunity cost of destroying the supplies was very low for her and her ally, since they did not need the Cornucopia to survive, but causes severe hardship for the remaining Careers. Rue gets caught up in a net and is killed by the boy from District One—Rue's death will be looked at in more detail shortly—and Katniss kills him immediately with an arrow to the neck. She cannot save Rue, but she takes both her supplies and the supplies from the District One tribute and the differences in each tribute's preparedness is astounding. Katniss notes that

Rue's pack holds my sleeping bag, her nearly empty water skin, a handful of nuts and roots, a bit of rabbit, her extra socks, and her slingshot. The boy from District 1 has several knives, two spearheads, a flashlight, a small leather pouch, a first-aid kit, a full bottle of water, and a pack of dried fruit. A pack of dried fruit! Out of all he might have chosen from. To me, this is a sign of extreme arrogance. Why bother to carry food when you have such a bounty back at camp? When you will kill your enemies so quickly you'll be home before you're hungry? (Collins 240)

Rue was obviously much more conservative with her supplies than the boy from District One. Her water bottle was "nearly empty" but still had water in it. There is no guarantee she would have met Katniss in time to replenish her water supply. She had bits of food to hold her until she could meet with Katniss again. She had supplies such as a sleeping bag and extra socks to keep her warm in case she was stuck alone overnight, and a simple tool to defend herself in case she was attacked. The District One tribute, on the other hand, did not consider the possibility that he

might not get back to his allies and supplies before sundown. He did not pack for an overnight stay in the woods, and all he had to sustain himself was a bag of dried fruit. With all the supplies he had access to back at camp, it truly is arrogant that he would not supply himself with more than just one small bag of food. His backpack was full of weapons to kill his enemies, but not items to keep himself alive for an extended period on his own. The differences between Rue's pack and the boy from District One's pack should allow an audience member the insight to guess each one's home district even if they had no idea prior to Katniss exposing the contents of their bags. Rue was conservative and wary, and the items of her pack shows she does not expect her next meal, whereas the boy from District One exuded arrogance and superiority, and his priority was to kill rather than think where his next meal would come from. The line drawn between life and death is very fine, and expectations differ vastly based on a tribute's home district. As shown in this section, one can easily see how different experiences with resources and specialization has shaped various tactics during the Hunger Games. This does not hold true only for tributes in the fictitious country of Panem, but in the real-world as well. Americans, for example, take resources such as clean water for granted, but in other countries, people cannot always access water as easily. Americans would be deeply troubled if their showers did not turn on one day, and in this sense, we are dependent on the companies who provide us water, while in countries who do not expect water as reliably, there would not be as incensed if they could not bathe for one day. Dependability in a sense drives the severity of opportunity cost. We will look at another resources many Americans take for granted in the section below.

4.1 The Baker and His Bread: Economic Rebellion

Bread functions in Collins' series as both a literary symbol and as an important economic tool, but this is not specific only to *The Hunger Games*. From a literary perspective, bread in the

series symbolizes life, death, hope, and rebellion. From an economic standpoint, bread symbolizes a very scarce resource that is controlled by the Capitol, and as will be explained in this section, bread also represents specialization and the distinct disparity of wealth between the Capitol and the twelve districts. There is also a moment where bread functions as a form of rebellion from an economic perspective, and this pivotal moment and others will be discussed in conjunction with a literary analysis of bread throughout this section.

Bread is most closely associated with Peeta Mellark, Katniss' fellow District Twelve tribute. Prior to the Games, he is a member of the small upper-class of District Twelve. He is the son of the district baker, and to Katniss and other members of the Seam, he lives a luxurious life.

When Peeta is reaped for the Games, the audience is first introduced to Peeta's kind nature. Katniss recalls the first interaction she had with Peeta, and laments:

Oh, no... Not him... Why him? I think. Then I try to convince myself it doesn't matter.

Peeta Mellark and I are not friends. Not even neighbors. We don't speak. Our only real interaction happened years ago. He's probably forgotten it. But I haven't and I know I never will... the money ran out and we were slowly starving to death... I lifted the lid to the baker's trash bin and found it spotlessly, hopelessly bare. Suddenly a voice was screaming at me and I looked up to see the baker's wife, telling me to move on and did I want her to call the Peacekeepers and how sick she was of having those brats from the Seam pawing through her trash. (Collins 25-29)

Katniss, after her father's death, became the sole provider of her family. Even though she did what she could to provide, she was only a child, and they were starving. Starvation is not an uncommon demise in District Twelve (Collins 28), and Katniss and her family are very close to becoming just three more emaciated bodies in the street. She turns to her last resort, which is

rummaging through the trash. The baker's wife sees her and likens her actions to that of a wild animal by using the verb "pawing." Katniss's hands at this time are "empty of any hope" (Collins 29), and the baker's wife shows absolutely no sympathy. Hope came in the form of the baker's son, Peeta:

I notice him, a boy with blond hair peering out from behind his mother's back... His mother went back into the bakery, grumbling, but he must have been watching me... The realization that I'd have nothing to take home had finally sunk in... There was a clatter in the bakery and I heard the woman screaming again and the sound of a blow... Feet sloshed toward me... It was the boy. In his arms he carried two large loaves of bread... His mother was yelling, 'Feed it to the pig, you stupid creature! Why not? No one decent will buy burned bread!' (Collins 30)

Instead of giving this bread to the pigs, he threw them at Katniss, who quickly grabbed the loaves and ran away. She remembered, "The heat of the bread burned into my skin, but I clutched it tighter, clinging to life" (Collins 31).

Collins repeatedly illustrates the theory of specialization throughout the series, including Peeta, through his distinct physical characteristics. Katniss first notes is that Peeta is blond. His blond hair does not fit the "straight black hair, olive skin" and "gray eyes" that are common physical attributes of the "families who work the mines" (Collins 8). In fact, Peeta more closely resembles Katniss's mother and sister, who, "with their light hair and blue eyes, always look out of place. They are. My mother's parents were part of the small merchant class that caters to officials, Peacekeepers, and the occasional Seam customer" (Collins 8). Those who do not "fit" the characteristics of a typical Seam resident do not work in the coal mines. This is no accident. Blond hair in District Twelve is Collins's symbol of individuals with unique trades that do not

align with the production of coal District Twelve is known for. Peeta did not choose to be the baker's son, so he did not choose the blond hair of the "upper" echelon of District Twelve, but he was granted this supposedly superior status at birth. Collins does not differentiate the supposed haves and have-nots in District Twelve through an enhancement such as a tattoo which can be applied later in life, she is emphasizing that the people of Panem have absolutely no choice in what role they have in their district.

Since Katniss and Prim's parents each had different characteristics (Katniss's father looked like a coal miner, while Katniss's mother has the looks of the "merchant class" of District Twelve) Katniss and Prim each had the possibility of looking like one or the other. Neither Katniss nor Prim have characteristics of both parents, and I argue that this is due to the symbolic nature of physical attributes in the series. Katniss does not have gray eyes and blond hair, she is not both a coal miner's daughter and a merchant's daughter. She is a coal miner's daughter with dark hair and gray eyes and relates more to her father through their affinity for hunting and their strong wills than to her mother. Prim, on the other hand, most closely relates to their mother through their shared passion of healing. These relationships are emphasized through their appearance.

Dissecting the section further, it should be noted that the baker's wife continues to show her supposed class superiority by saying no one "decent" would buy the bread Peeta had burned. Peeta played to his mother's shallowness to ensure Katniss, a girl he had never spoken to before, did not starve. By burning the bread, he "ruined" his father's goods, and his mother believed that their customers would not purchase such damaged items. He risked a beating to give Katniss the chance to cling to life. The audience is meant to understand that when Katniss looks at her fellow

tribute, she sees the boy she credits with saving her life and through this act of kindness, Peeta gave life to her family as well.

4.2 The Dangerous Power of a Baker

Peeta continues to be associated with bread, but rather than giving life in the forms of two loaves of bread, Katniss now sees his status as a baker as potentially dangerous; if she is friendly to “the boy with the bread” this could be detrimental to her chances of survival. The opportunity cost of her befriending the boy who saved her life becomes exponentially greater, as a friendship could mean her premature death. This fact ultimately causes Katniss to keep Peeta at a distance, as she wants to be alone in the arena more than she wants the possibility of an ally to turn on her. The chapter in which Peeta and Katniss are chosen as tributes ends with a motion from the mayor “for Peeta and me to shake hands” and Katniss notices that, “His are as solid and warm as those loaves of bread” (Collins 32-33). Katniss is shaking hands with her life giver, the “boy with the bread” as she refers to him, and she is shaking hands with someone she now believes will kill her. The hands that gave her life are now a threat to her survival. Katniss continues to have perverse thoughts of betrayal as they enter the Capitol for the first time and she notices Peeta smiling and waving to the crowd, trying to win favor with potential rich sponsors, and she thinks “He hasn’t accepted his death. He is already fighting hard to stay alive. Which also means that kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave me the bread, is fighting hard to kill me” (Collins 60). Katniss believes that based on Peeta’s actions, he is fighting hard to acquire gifts in the arena that would make his chances of survival potentially greater than her own. By waving at the sea of Capitol citizens, the hands that gave Katniss life are now beckoning to the audience to save “the boy with the bread” rather than her. Katniss believes Peeta is attempting to portray that sponsoring him is a much better idea than sponsoring the sullen tribute he arrived with.

In an interview conducted by David Levithan, Collins addresses how bread is both a driving symbol of Peeta's character, and also a crucial resource that allows the Capitol to control Panem and its economy. The interviewer asks her, "Why is Peeta a baker?" and Collins responds by saying:

Bread crops up a lot in *The Hunger Games*. It's the main food source in the districts, as it was for many people historically. When Peeta throws a starving Katniss bread in the flashback, he's keeping her alive long enough to work out a strategy for survival. It seemed in keeping with his character to be a baker, a life giver. But there's a dark side to bread, too. When Plutarch Heavensbee [a Gamemaker] references it, he's talking about Panem et Circenses, Bread and Circuses, where food and entertainment lull people into relinquishing their political power. Bread can contribute to life or death in *The Hunger Games*.

Although Plutarch Heavensbee is not a very prominent character in the first book, Collins is referring to a comment made by him in the third book in which the name of the country, Panem, is discussed. For citizens of Panem to survive, they must give up their power. If the citizens do not concede to the rule of the Capitol, there is even more chance they will starve. The citizens of the Capitol are not only given food to "lull" them into giving their power up to the Capitol, but they also get the entertainment of the Games to keep them in the palm of the Capitol.

Peeta does not succumb to the Capitol's agenda; rather, he tells Katniss prior to the Games beginning that "'I want to die as myself... I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not'" (141). It is as if he realizes and acknowledges the power that he holds in his hands to either give life or take it away. As Caroline Jones observes, Peeta takes on the role of the "Pacific resistor" (233). According to Jones, "Pacific resistors resist

the combative model itself: Peeta, for instance, does not want to play the game of the Capitol's terms" (233). This idea calls back to Peeta's testament that he wants to die as "himself" who up to this point has been a life-giver, rather than a murderer. Instead of playing into the darker side of his persona, he maintains his role as a life-giver through mainly peaceful resistance. Peeta's affinity for peace does not abandon him even in the Games when he is one of 24 tributes forced into an arena meant to spill blood for the entertainment of the Capitol, and his role as a baker actually allows him to maintain his identity of a kind-hearted soul. In this ironic twist, being forced to work in a bakery, and more specifically by being the one to decorate the cakes in his father's shop, Peeta obtains the skills to survive in the games for an extended period without harming any other tributes. Peeta's abilities as a baker transcend the oppressive regime of forced specialization of labor. Every district needs a baker, because there is no district dedicated to baked goods, so his lack of being tied to the needs of a specific district allows him the crucial skills necessary to survive and maintain his role as a "pacific resistor." His skills are not limited to the borders of District Twelve, or even the arena, and the fact that he is able to take knowledge from his profession and use it in the Games allows him to maintain his identity and stay himself as "the boy with the bread."

4.3 The Bread and the Bow Beyond Specialization

Both Katniss and Peeta are able to use skills that they learned through hunting and baking—neither of which is specific to District Twelve—to make it to the final remaining tributes. Although in years past only one tribute was allowed to return home a victor, in an unlikely turn of events, the officiant of the games announces that surviving tributes from the same district will both be allowed to return home as victors. The fact that Katniss and Peeta were able to use skills not strictly related to District Twelve's labor force allowed their chances of

survival to increase even more once they were allowed to team up and combine their skills. One is better at hunting while the other is better at camouflage, and this echoes back to the theory of comparative advantage. By joining forces and sharing the benefits of their skills, both tributes are better off. As soon as Katniss hears this new rule, she immediately goes looking for Peeta and while looking hears someone say, “You here to finish me off, sweetheart?” (Collins 252). This sound causes her to jump and look around for Peeta because no one besides Peeta or Haymitch ever called her sweetheart. She continues looking for him:

My eyes peruse the bank, but there’s nothing. Just mud, the plants, the base of the rocks... His voice was right under my feet. Still, there’s nothing. Then his eyes open, unmistakably blue in the brown and green leaves... it’s the final word in camouflage. Forget chucking weights around. Peeta should have gone into his private session with the Gamemakers and painted himself into a tree. Or a boulder. Or a muddy bank full of weeds. ‘Close your eyes again,’ I order. He does, and his mouth, too, and completely disappears. Most of what I judge to be his body is actually under a layer of mud and plants. His face and arms are so artfully disguised as to be invisible. I kneel beside him. ‘I guess all those hours decorating cakes paid off.’ Peeta smiles. ‘Yes, frosting is the final defense of the dying.’ (Collins 252)

While Katniss was able to reap the benefits of her hunting prowess, Peeta took advantage of his skills as a cake decorator. While Katniss’ talent is deadly, Peeta’s is passive. Peeta does not even use any of the tools or resources that the Gamemakers provided in the arena; at this point of the novel, he simply uses the mud and natural resources surrounding him. He seems to completely reject the principles of the Game by disconnecting himself from the other tributes and from the resources scattered throughout the arena for the pleasure of the Gamemakers and Capitol

citizens. Peeta would rather slowly bleed out in the mud than try and fight another tribute, while Katniss is not afraid to use her bow to defend herself. The differences between Katniss and Peeta exemplifies the idea that he is a “pacific resistor” and that his skills allowed him to stay himself and not turn into a pawn in the Capitol’s Games.

4.4 Bread: A Symbol of Disparity

Collins repeatedly uses bread as a symbol of specialization, and to symbolize the economic disparity between the districts and the Capitol. Peeta explains to both Katniss and the readers how the appearance of bread differs depending on the district in which it was produced:

Peeta empties our breadbasket and points out how they have been careful to include types from the districts along with the refined bread of the Capitol. The fish-shaped loaf tinted green with seaweed from District 4. The crescent moon roll dotted with seeds from District 11. Somehow, although it’s made from the same stuff, it looks a lot more appetizing than the ugly drop biscuits that are the standard fare at home. (Collins 97-98)

District Twelve, the poorest district, has unappetizing “ugly drop biscuits” to sustain themselves, whereas districts with incrementally more privilege have bread that “looks a lot more appetizing.” The appearance of the bread—from the discoloration to the filler to the very shape of the loaves—appears to become more appetizing the closer a district is to the Capitol.

Many scholars have noticed that bread symbolizes economic and class disparity in *The Hunger Games* series. In Sarah Hardstaff’s article, “Run, Run as Fast as You can: ‘The Boy with the Bread’ in *The Hunger Games*,” she focuses almost exclusively on the symbolic nature of bread in Collins’s series, and also how Peeta’s role as a baker helps characterize his personality and how Katniss perceives him. The article starts with historical background on the role of bread in civilizations by explaining, “For centuries, bread occupied a unique position in the European

collective consciousness, often meaning the difference between life and death” (371). Suzanne Collins is not the only person to note the significance of bread and its life-giving power, and this article makes her series seem simply like an added voice to this old tradition. Hardstaff also notes that “In Western culture, bread retains its status as a site of power struggle, emblematic of freedom from want and oppression, and, through Christianity, freedom from death itself” (371). Although many authors discuss sacrifice in Collins’ series, Hardstaff specifically relates bread and sacrifice to Christianity, and the sacrificial nature of bread is most certainly present in Peeta. Peeta is hopelessly in love with Katniss and will do anything to protect her in the arena, even if it means dying so that she can go home to her family. Katniss and the reader do not realize this is Peeta’s mindset for the duration of the novel, and so Katniss and the reader alike are distrustful of Peeta. Peeta’s job as a baker then becomes no coincidence, as he represents both life in the form of the loaves he threw to a young and starving Katniss, and now he also symbolizes the possibility of death. Peeta’s characterization through his area of expertise echoes back to the powerful contribution of specialization of labor in this dystopian series. Bread would not define Peeta nearly as much, if at all, if he had been a District Twelve coal miner rather than a baker’s son.

Hardstaff not only looks at Peeta and his complex identity through the symbolic power of bread as both life and death, but she also notes the physical nature of bread and its connection to status. Hardstaff explains that white loaves of bread are historically associated with the wealthy, while bread that is darker in color (due to being “mixed with grasses, herbs, or other grains” (374)) is associated with the poor. This historic symbol is present in Collins’ series as each District can be identified by the colors and additives of their respective specialty (375). One key

example of this historic identifier is present in *The Hunger Games* after Katniss honors the life and death of her District Eleven ally, Rue. She is about to leave the site of Rue's murder:

When a silver parachute floats down and lands in front of me. A gift from a sponsor. But why now? I've been in fairly good shape with supplies... I open the parachute and find a small loaf of bread. It's not the fine white Capitol stuff. It's made of a dark ration grain and shaped in a crescent. Sprinkled with seeds. I flashback to Peeta's lesson on the various district breads in the Training Center. This bread came from District 11. I cautiously lift the still warm loaf. What must it have cost the people of District 11 who can't even afford to feed themselves...It had been meant for Rue, surely. But instead of pulling the gift when she died, they'd authorized Haymitch to give it to me. As a thank-you?... For whatever reason, this is a first. A district gift to a tribute who's not your own. I lift my face and step into the last falling rays of sunlight. 'My thanks to the people of District Eleven,' I say. I want them to know where it came from. That the full value of the gift has been recognized. (Collins 238-9)

Katniss realizes immediately that the bread is not from the Capitol due to the color and consistency of the loaf. A white loaf symbolizes power and money, not only throughout history but in this dystopian future as well. As Hardstaff notes, the more impure the loaf, and therefore the less appealing, the poorer the maker. The "dark ration grain" and "seeds" taint the whiteness of the loaf and show the status of the sponsor. This historic trend is also discussed in Lori L. Parks' and Jennifer P. Yamashiro's article, "Consumed: Food in *The Hunger Games*." This article explains how in the series, "as in the historical past, food divides rich and poor, empowered and oppressed, pure and putrid" (138). When resources are scarce, the powerful get the best resources while the poorer citizens get the leftovers that are unwanted by the rich. The

favoritism shown by the Capitol to its citizens over the districts is evident in many different ways, and one symbol that unquestionably shows the Capitol's nepotism is the state of a loaf of bread as one travels further down the list of Districts.

4.5 Gift of Political and Economic Subversion

Discussing the byproducts that are included in each district's unique loaf of bread allows Katniss and the reader to finally grasp how absolute the Capitol's control is over the economy and the clear favoritism it shows over its richer citizens. This also enlightens Katniss and the reader to the issues that arise when a command economy is also totally in control of the political aspects of a country as well. Political and economic power in the hands of one entity is very positive for the rich but is detrimental to the poor. When Katniss and Rue first form their alliance, Katniss highlights the tight hold that the Capitol has on communication between districts, and the stark lack of knowledge she has of other districts due to this oppression. Katniss is surprised when Rue is so hesitant to take a whole cooked bird leg for herself. Katniss remarks:

'I'd have thought, in District Eleven, you'd have a bit more to eat than us. You know, since you grow the food.' Rue's eyes widen. 'Oh no, we're not allowed to eat the crops.' 'Do you get all the coal you want?' Rue asks. 'No,' I answer. 'Just what we buy and whatever we track in on our boots.' 'Don't you have to be in school?' I ask. 'Not during harvest. Everyone works then,' says Rue. It's interesting, hearing about her life. We have so little communication with anyone outside our district. In fact, I wonder if the Gamemakers are blocking out our conversation, because even though the information seems harmless, they don't want people in different districts to know about one another (Collins 203).

Katniss realizes this separation keeps the districts disempowered, while giving the Capitol easy control over citizens and the resources produced by their forced labor. Katniss also realizes how severe the Capitol's control over the economy is through her conversation with Rue. The questions of who gets what, who gives what, and who produces it are all answered by the Capitol, and if a citizen of District Eleven is bold enough to rebel and eat any of the crops they pick, they are severely beaten. The Capitol is the sole distributor of all goods. This moment shows how far-reaching and total the Capitol's control is. District Eleven is not better off than District Twelve, and this was previously unknown knowledge for Katniss and the reader.

These historical and symbolic elements to bread enhance the importance of District Eleven's actions when it chooses to take on the opportunity cost of sending a loaf of their unique bread to Katniss when they hardly have enough to feed themselves. As Katniss explains to the reader, no tribute has ever been gifted a resource from sponsors in districts other than their own, and this very noticeable choice by District Eleven to overcome the boundaries of sharing with only your own district stems from Katniss's act of kindness to her fallen ally. Katniss, while Rue lay dying due to mortal wounds inflicted by the boy tribute from District One, sang to her, and after she took her last breath, she adorned her body with wildflowers. Katniss's act of compassion is yet another way she is able to transcend the boundaries put in place by the Capitol to separate and weaken the districts. Returning to Katniss's display of affection for her fallen ally, Rue, District Eleven pools together their meager savings to give a gift to a tribute from another district. Although this transaction does not involve the exchange of money, it allowed for District Eleven to repay their debt to Katniss and show their thanks for staying with Rue to the end. In turn, the loaf provides sustenance for Katniss and invigorates her to continue fighting in the Games.

This trade illustrates the possibilities for undermining the economic and political oppression put in place by the Capitol, and this oppression is reaffirmed every year through the Games themselves. Cleveland, Holder, and O'Toole explain: "Eliminating travel and communication barriers between districts would encourage not only trade, but labour mobility and the free exchange of intellectual property, benefitting both sides of the border" (163). The Capitol has ironclad barriers in place with no room for trade or communication, so instead of economic growth, Panem is doomed to an existence of stagnation and the starvation of its people.

In an ironic point of divergence in the Capitol's seemingly iron-clad command economy and total rule over the districts, all districts and the Capitol can participate in sponsoring the Games. While there is a cost—which grows exponentially as the number of tributes decreases—there are no rules in the Games preventing districts from sponsoring tributes from other districts. This loophole provides the citizens of Panem the rare opportunity to cross borders in the sense that they can exchange intellectual property—in the form of compassion and gratefulness—but also in the physical form of a single loaf of bread that shows the support that Katniss has from District Eleven.

The fact that the gift is a loaf of bread also echoes back to Parks' and Yamashiro's article. They note: "The Capitol controls the districts through the restriction of food. This insidious deprivation is intended to suppress rebellion with physical emaciation, a lack of trust between neighbors, and a heightened fear for their lives" (138). Prolonged starvation proves to be a very powerful and effective means of oppression and control. District Eleven is given the chance to overpower the Capitol's restriction of food by providing Katniss with an entire loaf of bread to herself, which is something she never would have even dreamed of back home in District

Twelve. This section of the novel shows the tremors of rebellion through these economic theories, and without a clear understanding of these topics, readers may very well miss the significance of District Eleven's gift. It is not just a loaf of bread, but it is also a symbol of an impoverished district undercutting the Capitol's economic restrictions and oppression. Rather than succumbing to the barriers put in place by the Capitol, District Eleven finds a way to utilize a very scarce resource to give thanks to a girl from a different district and also spark the idea that there is the potential to overcome the Capitol's barriers and strengthen bonds with other districts.

5.1 Conclusion

Although I only discussed the first novel of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the motifs and economic theories discussed in this thesis carry forward into the next two novels. Economic topics such as specialization of labor and opportunity cost tend to operate without people realizing that they are acting according to these concepts, and they are also not very complicated concepts to understand. These factors ultimately made me choose the theories and concepts I utilized in my essay. My aim was not to confuse my reader with complicated economic theory; rather, I hoped to highlight the natural and common occurrences of economics in everyday life to emphasize that these concepts can be seen in settings other than simply dystopian novels.

Within this paper I looked at the physical depictions of specialization of labor through costumes, physical characteristics, and the different appearances of bread. The utilization and exploitation of resources was also examined as a means of discerning the economic background of characters in the novel. There were parallels made between how characters in the novel used the concept of opportunity cost in a similar manner to how people in the real-world utilize this economic theory; and more interestingly, this thesis emphasized the fact that people use such economic concepts in their daily lives without necessarily understanding them. The many facets

of the symbolic nature of a loaf of bread and Peeta Mellark's role as a baker were discussed in detail in section four of my thesis. I also looked at various means in which characters such as Peeta and Katniss used their skills to undermine the power of the Capitol due to not being kept in the mines of District Twelve, which allowed them the opportunity to transcend the constraints placed on other citizens who were forced into District-specific labor. Although all these topics were discussed in detail within this thesis, further research could provide an avenue into how scarce resources affect inter-District relationships and the remarkable complexity of symbols such as birds and fire in Collins' novel.

Suzanne Collins, whether she realizes it or not, utilized *The Hunger Games* series as a tool to warn readers of the dangers of total government control over economic liberties and individual choice, and this warning rings true in the real world as well. Although it is entertaining to read dystopian novels, it is important to remember that the economic theories that were discussed in this thesis are not works of fiction, and that the repercussions of a truly domineering command economy are not issues found solely in fictitious worlds. Combining Economics and English allows for a new and innovative interpretation of novels such as *The Hunger Games*, but readers can utilize both these disciplines while reading the newspaper as well. The perspective I have given in this thesis by combining economic and literary theory does not work only on works of fiction, and this will hopefully allow readers to think differently about what they see in a news article or to even understand why a person makes a certain choice. I hope that this thesis will allow readers to see that there is more than one way to look at a situation and going forward I would encourage every reader to seek out more than one way to evaluate what is before them, whether from an economic or literary standpoint, be it a work of fiction or reality.

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