

STUDENT VL

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Unity vs. Isolation

Orphaned children gather on the streets, their faces dirty and tired, begging for just ten cents to buy something to fill their empty and growling stomachs. Some dig through food scraps on the street, trying to salvage anything they can. Others that are on the edge of death can do nothing more than lay on the cement and wait for their throbbing hunger to take over their body. This is the brutal reality of life in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, most commonly known as North Korea. To start, in the society of Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games Trilogy, there is unity throughout the 13 districts. To add, becoming a Hunger Games victor brings life-changing benefits to the whole district. In addition, the class structure of the society contributes to famine, as well as prosperity. Finally, educating children about their industry, the medical field, and war is a benefit to living in Panem. Living in the totalitarian society of the Hunger Games would be superior to living in the dictatorial country of North Korea.

In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist, is a 16-year-old girl who lives in District 12 in the country of Panem. Foremost, there is unity in Katniss' community, the Seam. Before the 74th annual Hunger Games and addition of the new Head Peacekeeper, the original Peacekeepers of District 12 were easy-going. Everyone was treated as equals by the good-humored Peacekeepers who were tolerant with the enforcement of laws. Moreover, people in the Seam cared about helping each other. Those who were involved in mine explosions or contracted an illness were brought to Katniss' mother who made herbal

concoctions to ease their pain (“*The Hunger Games*” 256). Most importantly, in *Catching Fire* by Suzanne Collins, Katniss experiences the unity of Panem on her Victory Tour of District 11, Rue’s district. Rue was Katniss’ ally and friend during the 74th Hunger Games and was killed in the arena. “Then, from somewhere in the crowd, someone whistles Rue’s four-note mockingjay tune. The one that signaled the end of the workday in the orchards. The one that meant safety in the arena... What happens next is not an accident... it happens in complete unison. Every person... presses the three middle fingers of their left hand against their lips and extends them to me. It’s our sign in District 12, the last good-bye I gave to Rue in the arena,” (“*Catching Fire*” 61). Some may argue that the Capitol is not in unity with the districts, as shown during the rebellions in Suzanne Collins’ *Mockingjay*. A Capitol bombing killed 90 percent of District 12’s population, the 10,000 people reducing to about 800 refugees (“*Mockingjay*” 6). However, North Korea’s dictator, Kim Jong-un, does not maintain a stable leadership, having to uphold his power through a reign of terror (*Secret State of North Korea*). Kim Jong-un sends innocent civilians to prison camps where they are tortured, an estimated total of 232,400 imprisoned North Koreans (Hui). According to the documentary *Secret State of North Korea*, if people stop believing in the regime, central control will break down. This displays the disunification of the regime and North Koreans and how fragile the regime’s power is. The unity that Katniss brought to Panem spread, while the Hunger Games brought celebration and food.

The deathly Hunger Games has a positive side that improves the society’s living conditions. To begin, children between ages 12 and 18 have the opportunity to enter their name more than once in the Reaping for tesserae, extra grain and oil. This is a way that some families escape famine, as one tessera provides enough food for one person for a whole year (“*The Hunger Games*” 13). Moreover, after a victor returns to their district, a holiday for the whole

district with free food and entertainment is provided by the Capitol. Parcel Day is part of the celebration where everyone in the district gets a food package. “To see all those hungry kids in the Seam running around...To know that once a month for a year they would all receive another parcel. That was one of the few times I actually felt good about winning the Games” (“*Catching Fire*” 25). Lastly, winners of the Hunger Games are given an elegant mansion made of white marble in the Victors’ Village. Nevertheless, it is unjust that the Capitol forces young children to fight to the death. Those in power watch the bloody battle and bet on the strongest tributes and who will come out alive. The Capitol adds deranged mutations to the arena to make the Games more exciting and entertaining to viewers, mainly those in the Capitol. On the contrary, unlike the accessibility and benefit of tesserae, in North Korea, famine in the 1990s killed one million people (“North Korea 101: The History of North Korea”). More than 75 percent of North Korea’s population does not have enough food to eat (*Secret State of North Korea*), and 40 percent is undernourished (Noh). The benefits of winning the Hunger Games improve life in Panem, but the class structure also affects everyone.

Compared to North Korea, Panem’s class structure is fairer. To start, the Capitol and citizens of District One are very wealthy and have well-nourished tributes to win the Hunger Games. The Capitol shares its elegant feasts and abundant food with the Hunger Games tributes before they enter the arena. To add, the wealthy merchant class rarely experiences hunger, their thrown out scraps becoming the contrived meal of people living in the Seam. Furthermore, people who live in the Seam are the mine workers of District 12, and while it is hard labor, they are paid. Most North Koreans are subjected to forced, uncompensated, and unpaid labor at some point in their lives (“North Korea: Events of 2020”) to sustain North Korea’s economy (“North Korea: Events of 2021”). Admittedly, the con of Panem’s social structure is being born into a

social class and unable to advance to a higher status. Miners from District 12 work six grueling days a week, with the danger of mine explosions. Conversely, North Korea follows songbun, which sorts people into one of three classes based on their loyalty to the North Korean regime (“SONGBUN | Social Class in a Socialist Paradise”). According to Phil Robertson, “...Kim Il Sung’s government classified approximately 3.2 million people as members of the hostile class, relocating many of them to impoverished and isolated areas in the country’s north.” Using the songbun system, North Korean leaders continue to reward their friends and allies and punish their enemies (Robertson). The social structure in Panem brings advantages to all classes, while the education is widely available.

Education in Districts 12 and 13 developed and became more advanced over time. To begin, the education in District 12 prepares children to work in the district’s industry when they are 18 years old. Every school lesson is related to coal, including the yearly tour of the coal mines as part of students’ training. Educating children about their district’s role leads to a more stable and organized and well-functioning country. Furthermore, in *Mockingjay* by Suzanne Collins, anyone over the age of 14 learns combat training in District 13 to prepare for the rebellion against the Capitol. People in District 13 are given the same learning opportunities, unlike the discriminatory education system in North Korea. Last, not only is there military training, there are medic courses and training to become a doctor. This shows how, unlike North Korea, learning in the Hunger Games society is central and valuable. At the same time, the flaw in District 12’s education system is that they do not teach enough of the primary subjects. While basic reading, math, and Panem’s history is taught, these subjects are seen as second in superiority to the district’s industry. While this is true, North Korea’s education system is even more corrupt. According to the U.S. Department of State, “...authorities denied some children

educational opportunities and subjected them to punishment and disadvantages as a result of the songbun loyalty classification system...” This means that the North Koreans’ loyalty to the government determines the quality of their education and if they are punished. The education in the Hunger Games society provides everyone with the same opportunities and helps certain districts thrive.

Life in the Hunger Games society encompasses unity, rewards, fair class structure, and education unlike the egregious life in North Korea. First, the unity among the people of Panem is lacking in North Korea. Second, the Hunger Games yields rewards and opportunities for the victor and their district. Third, the pros of the class structure outweigh the cons of North Korea’s songbun structure. To conclude, education is valued more in Panem than in North Korea. Similar to how Panem’s rebellion made way for a new, flourishing country, the conquest of the world by Europeans shaped modern history today (*Guns, Germs, and Steel*). North Korea is the most isolated country in the world, with its poverty, famine, and torture hiding under the regime’s lies. A North Korean defector who risked his life swimming across the river to China stated, “It’s better to die than live like an insect [in North Korea]” (*Secret State of North Korea*). For the North Korean regime to survive, change and truth to its people and the world is essential.

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