

American Decency Association

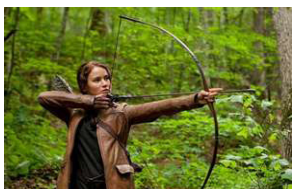
PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

May 2012

Hungry for the Hunger Games?

By Lisa Van Houten



Hungry for *The Hunger Games*? It seems as if millions of Americans are.

The Hunger Games is a trilogy of books authored by Suzanne Collins and geared toward adolescents of all ages, but is equally popular among older elementary ‘tweens,’ too. Adults are also getting caught up in the phenomenon. Christians, too, are caught up in *The Hunger Games* craze, drawing millions to the theater. There are even Bible study materials developed based on *The Hunger Games*.

The first book of the trilogy has now been made into a movie and is a huge blockbuster success. We’ve heard glowing, positive acclaim for the movie, and we’ve read concerning critiques about it as well.

With a movie that is obviously greatly impacting the culture, we at ADA decided to see what all the hoopla was about.

This is a synopsis of the story. *The Hunger Games* is set in a futuristic, godless society led by a ruthless totalitarian government. As a form of government control, once a year each of the nation’s 12 districts must send an adolescent boy and girl to participate in “The Hunger Games” – a competition where the teenagers fight to the death until just one is left alive. Beginning at the age of 12, the names of all youth are put in a lottery system and those chosen are sent off to the capital as the competitors in the hunger games.

The contestants train for the event, are paraded around to media interviews, and treated as celebrities. The “games” are televised across the country to a rapt audience of viewers as the ultimate in reality TV. The games take place in a huge outdoor woodland arena where the kids attempt to survive the elements

as well as the other kids trying to kill them.

Now, for my take on the movie. To be blunt, I found *The Hunger Games* to be very disturbing.

Keep in mind, this movie is geared toward teens, even young teens, but is also hugely popular with younger children as well. Just recently a Barbie doll was created based on the female lead character, Katniss. The doll is even accessorized with weaponry.

You might think the depictions of violence are what most concerned me. The games begin with each teen in on his/her starting block in an open field with a pile of weapons and survival gear in the center.

At the start, the kids run to the center trying to be first to the weapons and supplies. While the imagery is not as graphic as it could be, images are shown of blood splattering, one’s neck is slit, another impaled with sword, later images of one teen having

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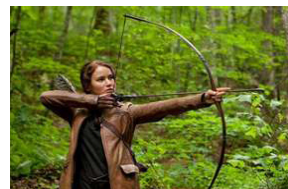
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his neck snapped, a young girl approximately 12 years of age is killed by a spear.

And while I found these scenes to be disturbing, I've seen "gorier" scenes in other movies—even movies I would recommend, such as *The Lord of the Rings* comes to mind. Another commendable movie geared toward kids which include battle scenes is *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. However, those battles in Middle Earth and Narnia were distinct battles of good forces vs. evil forces. In *The Hunger Games* the battle is not good vs. evil, but kids killing kids. Columbine come to life.

Many fans of the *The Hunger Games* – and the defenders are many—claim this story is about good and evil. While it's true there are definitely elements of good and evil, however, the contest portrayed in the movie is merely one of survival of the fittest.

Yes, there are underlying themes and symbolism that mature viewers can read into the storyline I can see the point the author makes about the evils of totalitarian rule. Viewers recognize and applaud the noble character traits of the heroine, Katniss, who volunteers to participate in the hunger games in place of her younger sister. And one can't help but be outraged about the inhumanity and unjustness of these bloody games.

Yet, is this what young viewers are really going to get out of the movie? Will they contemplate the threat of totalitarianism or make a correlation regarding the impact of media upon culture? I highly doubt it. Kids are caught up in the story, the action, the characters, and the star-crossed young lovers.

Psychologist Brenda Hunter, PhD, and education writer Kristen Blair stated: ***Americans were horrified recently when a 17-year-old boy shot and killed students at an Ohio high school, yet middle schools across the country will take students on field trips to see this movie in which kids slaughter kids to survive.***

Why this cultural disconnect? We are playing with fire. What children watch and read matters greatly. It seeps into their hearts, minds, and souls. ...

Movie Guide described the movie as "exceptionally dark" and states: "*With a stronghumanistworldview, THE HUNGER GAMES has no depiction of God or the supernatural world. ...there is no solid depiction of good and truth ... and no implication of a greater Hope. Ultimately, the story seems overly cynical and dehumanizing.*

This is my greatest concern regarding *The Hunger Games*. It denies the intrinsic worth of every life, created in the image of God. Instead, viewers are entertained by children being desensitized to kill. Humanity is diminished. Teens forced to participate in this grotesque game of murder are reduced to amoral killers. Fans of the movie can list a myriad of "lessons to be learned" from the film, but the bottom line is *The Hunger Games* is about kids killing other kids while the audience – both those depicted on the screen and those sitting in the theater – watch.



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