



The Hunger Games: A Study in Gambling

“Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favour.”

Introduction

A popular book used in many schools, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a futuristic dystopian novel in which gambling has a central role. The annual Hunger Games themselves begin with a lottery to determine which two young “tributes” from each of the nation’s 12 districts will be forced to fight one another to the death until only one “victor” is left. During the games, rich people in the Capitol bet on and sponsor the “tributes” whom they believe have the best chance at ultimate survival. Their own children, who live in the Capitol, do not have to participate in the Hunger Games. They instead have the luxury of watching from afar the visually stimulating yet gruesome media spectacle featured on TV each year.

The Hunger Games provides young readers an opportunity to think about gambling and reflect on the emotional appeal and complex roles it plays in society.

Instructional strategies

1. After students have read *The Hunger Games*, invite them to explore the role of gambling in the story and in our society using discussion questions like those below. If desired, have students work in small groups before following up with a larger class discussion.
 - Each year, the Games start with a lottery, called the “reaping.” Compare and contrast this lottery to lotteries in our society. You might suggest students use a Venn diagram for this.
 - i. Is the reaping fair? Are our lotteries fair?
 - ii. How do each work? Who plays them?
 - iii. Who benefits most from them? Who benefits least? Does it matter? Why or why not?
 - During the games, people in the Capitol bet on the outcome and have the option to send sponsorship gifts to help individual contestants (“tributes”). Compare and contrast this with sports betting in our society. Again a Venn diagram may be useful.
 - i. How does fairness figure in each?
 - ii. Is fairness important in such situations? Why or why not?
2. Like other past “victors,” Haymitch’s success in the games meant that he won a life of wealth and luxury. Yet Haymitch wasn’t happy. Why not? Invite students to write an essay about winning instant wealth asking them to explore:
 - Why someone who suddenly becomes rich might not be happy?
 - What, if anything, is more important than being rich?

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other



Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Assess the ways in which material goods are distributed in society, how those goods are valued and how this is related to gambling policies and behaviours
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling
- Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity

English Language Arts 7-9

Big ideas

- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world
- Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking
- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences

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