



The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

The Hunger Games is a futuristic dystopian novel, popular in BC schools, in which characters use a wide range of plant-based and synthetic drugs for a variety of reasons – pills for fever, ointment for burns, chewed up leaves for stings and infections. Some of the drugs in the story are psychoactive substances and play various roles. For example, the opioid-like substance referred to as sleep syrup is administered by lead character Katniss to relieve her partner Peeta’s pain when severely injured during the Games but also to forcibly control his movement and behaviour against his will. And, the hallucination-inducing drug in the wasp-like tracker jackers has LSD-like characteristics but the tracker jackers were originally developed as weapons. Alcohol is used in the Capitol as a social lubricant but its use in the districts seems to reflect a darker side.

The Hunger Games offers young readers an opportunity to reflect on the complex, often-contradictory roles that drugs – alcohol, opioids (painkillers), and hallucinogens – play in the human story.

Instructional strategies

1. Invite students to consider the passage (pp. 275-277) in which Katniss is hoping to receive a special medicine that will heal Peeta’s wound. She is disappointed at first when, instead, she receives sleep syrup – an opioid-like substance (like fentanyl) that takes away the pain but does not heal the wound but can also be an anesthetic that puts a person out for a period of time. After reviewing the passage invite students to discuss question like the following:
 - a. To what use does Katniss put the sleep syrup? Why?
 - b. The drug clearly has benefits in helping people deal with pain. What risks do you think it might also have?
 - c. In the story, no significant harm seems to come from the incident. How realistic do you think the story is in the way it portrays the use of this powerful drug? Try to draw attention to particular details and compare those with what you know about opioids (e.g., codeine, fentanyl, heroin) in our society.
 - d. Would it ever be right to give a person a powerful and risky drug against their will? Why or why not?
 - e. Do you think Katniss was right to give Peeta the sleep syrup? Explain.
2. Invite students to review the section (pp. 185-198) in which the tracker jackers are featured. Have students compare and contrast tracker jacker venom and the drug LSD in either a written assignment or a class discussion. You might suggest students use the [Drug History Timeline](#) to learn about LSD in preparation for the assignment.

[Drug History Timeline](#) provides a collection of historical facts related to human interactions with drugs throughout history. It was developed to provide students with a helpful research tool. They can browse through the collection or search or filter to find information related to particular drugs, issues or places.

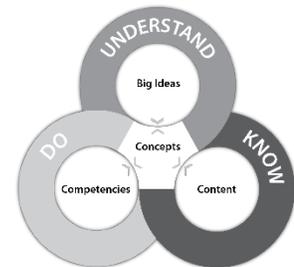
Available at drugtimeline.ca

3. Invite students to write a short essay on Haymitch’s use of alcohol. They should consider the possible reasons for his use as well as how it impacts his life and those around him. Encourage them to illustrate their points with examples from the book.
4. Other possible drug-related topics that could be explored using *The Hunger Games* as a stimulus include:
 - a. In what ways did Katniss’s knowledge of both plants and synthetic drugs help her survive and ultimately win the Hunger Games? Do you think knowledge about plants and drugs is helpful in real life too? Explain.
 - b. Explore the role of plant medicines in Indigenous and ancient cultures. How does it compare to the value our society places on plant medicines today? How does plant medicines compare to synthetic medicines in *The Hunger Games*? In our society? What do you think about that? Why?
 - c. Consider current conversations in the media and elsewhere about medical marijuana. What do you think about the role of cannabis (marijuana) as a medicine? Explain your ideas.

Drug literacy

Big ideas

- People have been using drugs for thousands of years and in almost every human culture
- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other



Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-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 involves generational roles and responsibilities
- 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
- 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