

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Tis Better To Give

Katniss Shows How It's Done in *Catching Fire*

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

It's Christmastime. Americans everywhere are decorating trees, making gingerbread men, and most importantly (for retailers, anyway) shopping, shopping, shopping. The average family will spend more than \$750 on gifts this year.

In the land of Panem, the fictional country from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Series—the second of which was just released as a massive motion picture starring Jennifer Lawrence—gifts are rarities.

Panem is ruled by a cruel government that manages its citizens through poverty and fear, and every year puts on a gladiatorial-style competition called *The Hunger Games*, just to show everyone who's in charge. Katniss Everdeen won the *Hunger Games* once before. This year, she's competing again, along with 23 other past champions. The games are designed to allow one person to survive. The rest are killed in competition.

In *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, Katniss and Peeta Mellark, her fellow contestant from District 12, see something strange happening. Contestants seem to be helping them—risking or sacrificing their own lives in the process. One woman runs into a poisonous mist, allowing someone in Katniss' party to carry an injured Peeta to safety. Another tribute dives in front of a killer monkey who nearly sinks its fangs into Peeta. Time after time, contestants seem driven not to win, but to help Peeta and Katniss survive.

Why so sacrificial? Oppressed by a government that has taken away almost everything these characters have, they use the only thing they can call their own—their talents, their lives and their love for each other—to fight back. Everyone in *Catching Fire*, including Peeta and Katniss, show a willingness to sacrifice themselves for other people.

We often hear that it's better to give than to receive. In the United States, when we have so many great gadgets, clothes and material things at our fingertips, those words can sometimes feel a little distant for us. In Panem, where the characters have so little, some people give everything they have for a greater purpose.

Talk About It:

Obviously, few people this holiday season will be asked to give *that* much. There aren't nearly as many vicious monkeys for one thing. Yet we can give of ourselves in other ways. What can you give to people this Christmas: Your time? Your effort and energy? A very special present?

We can be a little materialistic, particularly around this time of year. Many of us are hoping to get something special this Christmas. What are you most excited to give? What's the best gift you've ever received? What made it special? Was it the gift, or was it the thought behind the gift?

So many people around the world, and even in this country, won't be getting much of anything this Christmas due to poverty. Can you think of ways to give them a better holiday season? Does your church or youth group have special plans to do some charity work? Has your family participated in Operation Christmas Child or another outreach?

What the Bible Says:

Christmas is a time for giving—and no gift was greater than the gift of Jesus Himself. The Hunger Games echoes what Jesus did for us, in a way: Just as the tributes' sacrifices brought life to Katniss and Peeta and hope for a better future, so Jesus brought life and hope to all of us through His life and through His death.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Phil. 2:3-4).