



PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH BOOK CLUB

Faith, explored through fiction, fantasy and fun.

Mockingjay

BY SUZANNE COLLINS

90 minute adaptable lesson with additional optional activities

Supplies

- copy of *Mockingjay*
- computer with Internet access and speakers to play video clip
- butcher paper
- markers
- magazines and newspapers
- glue
- scissors
- newspaper headlines

Focus of the Session: In this meeting, participants should discuss the book *Mockingjay*—looking at the major characters and the theme of justice in a broken world—and connect the book’s world to our own and to one’s understanding of faith and God.

Objectives: This session asks participants to do the following:

1. Recall the main events of the book
2. Consider what justice is according to characters in the book and according to God and people of faith
3. Discuss the book and make connections to their lives
4. Engage with passages of Scripture that bring light to the book
5. Discuss how ethical decisions are determined

Welcoming Activity (10 minutes)

Gather participants in a circle. Have them introduce themselves by listing what they know to be true, as Katniss does throughout the book. Encourage them to list 5 to 10 things: their name, where they live, the people in their family, where they go to school, etc.

Book Review (5 minutes): Watch a summary of the book at schmoop.com or another website to stir the memory of those who have not read it in a while and to give an overview of the plot to those who have not read it. schmoop.com/video/mockingjay-summary¹

Theme Introduction (20 minutes): Much of the book depicts the rebels trying to bring about justice for the people of Panem.

- What is justice? Is it rebellion against oppression? Is justice simply being against those who oppress, like Coin leading the rebellion against the Capitol? Or is Katniss the only one really embracing justice?



- Read Micah 6:8. What does it look like when justice is paired with kindness and mercy? What happens when people do not pair justice with kindness and mercy? What does that kind of justice look like?
- Compare District 13 and the Capitol. How are they alike? How are they different?
- Though the Hunger Games appear to be over, in what ways do the Hunger Games never end? Why do the people of Panem continue to find it easier to be pawns of their leaders and societal systems? How are they fearful of the risks that come with freedom?

Bible Connection (20 minutes)

Once Katniss agrees to be the face of the rebellion as the Mockingjay, she is reunited with her prep crew and is once again remade.

- What does it mean for Katniss to be remade? In what ways is Katniss being remade in good ways? How is she being remade in bad ways?
- In our world, when is it bad to be remade? When is it good?

Introduce the story of Nicodemus from the Gospel of John. Nicodemus is a Jewish leader who sneaks out in the night to ask Jesus a question. He is secretive because, as you may know, Jesus was challenging the Jewish laws and orderly social world of that time. Nicodemus wants to know what it will take to follow Jesus and is hoping for an easy path. But he is told that he must be born anew (“from above”). Read John 3:1–15.

Jesus’ declaration left Nicodemus with a choice: stay the same, or be remade and born anew. Nicodemus was a Jewish leader with power among his people. His family and friends likely would have been Jewish too. He probably would have had to leave that world behind—his family, friends, home, synagogue, leadership, and power—to be born anew and have a life remade in following Christ. Nicodemus likely knew that it was a good choice to be remade, but also a risky one.

- What is Jesus asking of Nicodemus and us? What is at risk for Nicodemus? How does our faith call us to devote our whole lives to God? Is that easy? When is the choice to follow Jesus easy, and when is it difficult? We don’t really know how Nicodemus responded to this call to be born anew. Which choice do you think he made? How can you see God working in Nicodemus’s life?
- Katniss has to be born anew. She has to choose whom she will follow and how she will live, and this new life may be with new people. It is difficult to make choices to change our lives, especially when what we know and understand is comfortable, right, and moral. How do we make these choices?

How do we decide to change who we are for the greater good? Does it always require a sacrifice of our current life? How does Katniss respond to her call to a new role?

Book Discussion (30 minutes): Choose several questions from the following list to discuss the content of the book:

- Katniss is fed a slogan to repeat for the cameras: “People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!”² What does it mean to hunger for justice? Why does the slogan suggest that “ending our hunger for justice” is a good thing? Should we always hunger for justice? Imagine if those who hungered for justice stopped. Name a few justice movements from our recent history, like civil rights or women’s suffrage, or more recently LGBTQ inclusion and rights. How do these justice movements include more than one leader? How does hungering for justice motivate people?
- On page 81, the leaders of the rebellion claim that Peeta is a traitor after he publicly asks for a cease-fire. Is his request for cease fire against the rebellion? Are acts of nonviolence acts of rebellion? Give examples of nonviolent leaders who brought change (Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesus, etc.). Jesus was serious when he commanded his followers to turn the other cheek and to put down the sword. Would any of today’s movements look different if they were conducted nonviolently?
- Are the peacekeepers really keeping peace? What does peacekeeping today look like? What could it look like if Katniss or your youth group were in charge of world peacekeeping?
- Gale helps plan the rebellion and is willing to kill anyone who gets in its way. He does not worry about people surrendering, because the people of District 12 were not given the chance to surrender. Is it OK to take no prisoners? Is there ever a case where this is justified? Should human life be respected no matter what, even when those humans have taken innocent lives? Reread Micah 6:8.
- Upon Peeta’s rescue and arrival at District 13 we discover that he has been tortured, hijacked, and brainwashed by the Capitol. What does it mean to be brainwashed? How are we brainwashed in our culture: to be consumers, to go along with the crowd, or even to participate in extreme ideologies like that of Nazi Germany, where people participated in genocide? Though culture tells us one thing, our faith leads us in another direction. Read Romans 12:2. Based on this passage, what should transform us?
- On page 232, Katniss thinks: “All those months of taking it for granted that Peeta thought I was wonderful are over. Finally, he can see me for who I really am. Violent. Distrustful. Manipulative. Deadly. And I hate him for it.”³ Why can’t Katniss see good in herself? Why do we tend to be our own worst critics? Just a few pages ago, Johanna was telling Katniss that she

2. Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2010), 72.

3. Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2010), 232.

doesn't like her because she is jealous of her ability to be the defender-of-the-helpless. Why can't Katniss see that in herself? If we fully acknowledge the importance of our voice and work, how would that change our lives or the lives of the people around us? How does knowing that God can see us as good and worthy change the way we see ourselves and our worth in this world?

- There is a common saying that “hurt people hurt people.” At the end of chapter 17, Peeta joins the other soldiers in the dining room, where he is rude to Gale, Finnick, and Katniss. The soldiers know what Peeta has been through and that he is broken. Do they show compassion to him? Define compassion. Remind participants that compassion does not mean the offender gets to continue to hurt people, and that if someone is hurting others, it is important to tell a trusted adult. How do we show compassion to those who hurt others? Should we show compassion to the bully, the abuser, the mean kid?
- Early in the book, Katniss says she wants to kill President Snow. Throughout the book, she has this one mission in mind. When we get too set on our goal, like Katniss is set on killing Snow, how do we lose sight of the big picture? How did Katniss lose focus on the big picture? When we want to be on the soccer team or student government so badly, we can sabotage friendships, grades, church, etc. We do not mean to hurt others as we seek our goals. How do we avoid hurting the innocent? How do we train ourselves to have a wider lens?
- Throughout the *Hunger Games* trilogy, the characters must make decisions about what is right and wrong. They are faced with ethical decisions in the midst of tragedy, injustice, and war. Katniss explores the ethics of right and wrong. Gale sees his role as right, but Katniss begins to realize that Coin is using violence to work for what is right—the poor's voice and against the rich—while Snow is doing the reverse. Are there clear right and wrong choices for the characters? In society? Think of a few things that seem right to us, not killing and not stealing, for example. Is it always right to not kill? Is there ever a scenario where it might be acceptable? Also mention the example of placing children in car seats. For people in the United States, the choice is easy—it's the law. But what if you live in a country where car seats are not common, where people ride scooters, or where there is one small car for a large family? Is it still right? Should anyone be ashamed for not having a car seat?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Give students a piece of butcher paper and ask them to, in silence, cut out and glue newspaper headlines or pictures from magazines that represent ways our society does not act in justice, mercy, or kindness. After a few minutes, pray this prayer:

God of justice and mercy, it is difficult for us to act in kindness when we are so consumed with anger, grief, and the need for retribution. Help us to reconcile our differences instead of retaliating. Help us to act in love rather than in hate. Help us to bring about justice where injustice exists. Amen.

Optional Activities

- Split the group into two teams. Choose a hot ethical issue to debate. Assign each group to a side in the debate. Allow students to present their side. Be sure to allow time for rebuttals. At the end, ask students what side Jesus would take if he were participating in this debate. Are there passages of Scripture to back up that opinion?
- On large pieces of butcher paper, have participants create proposals (propaganda shots) or advertisements for specific themes in the book: justice, right vs. wrong, reconciliation, mercy, etc.
- Play a game of “real or not real.” Use real and fictional news headlines. After you read a headline, ask, “Real or not real?” Allow youth to respond, and then reveal whether the headline is real. When it is, consider sharing extra details and facts about the event, and ask if anything can be done to help remedy the situation.

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