

Extended Essay

Title: Power of performing in Panem

Research Question: How does writer portray the forced transformation of individuals under the Capitol's control in the book Sunrise on the Reaping?

Subject: English B

Category 3

Word Count: 3985

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Public Opinion And Propaganda	4
Media and Spectacle.....	7
Class disparity and Inequality	11
Conclusion.....	14
References	15

Introduction

There are plenty authoritarian states using not just violence to maintain their hold on power, but also by having "good performance". Acts of violence in authoritarian states are typically not private they are carried out publicly, choreographed and theatrical in nature. Examples of this are public executions, loyalty rituals, and controlled televised broadcasts. Such acts are not purely displays of power in fact they are specifically designed as spectacles to raise fear and demand compliance by the transformation of human suffering, into a symbolic ritual of state sanctioned control. The Hunger Games Sunrise On The Reaping by Suzanne Collins is an excellent example of this type of world, where abuse exists as a continuation of terror, as well as being exploited through popular culture. (Bourdieu 45)

In a dystopian society called Panem, the story's events take place in futuristic settings a devastated North America. Capitol is a city of wealth, power, and authority that controls every aspect of daily life. Surrounding the Capitol is 12 different Districts, all of which have been financially drained, abused through forced labor, and relied upon for raw materials that the Capitol uses to keep its extreme standard of living. The original trilogy by author Suzanne Collins focuses on teenager Katniss Everdeen however, the prequel entitled Sunrise on the Reaping shifts its focus to Haymitch Abernathy, who is portrayed as a man filled with anger and resentment. His first-person narration offers an intimate and emotionally raw portrait of what it means to be pulled into the Capitol's propaganda machine not just physically, but psychologically. Through Haymitch's narrative, Suzanne Collins depicts how totalitarianism is exercised through physical violence as well as through narrative control in Panem. The novel "Sunrise on the Reaping" illustrates that in Panem, rebellion is not simply suppressed, but rather reframed and aestheticized, and televised until it has been incorporated into the

State apparatus of power. As such, this results in a transformation of the personality of an individual. This essay examines the research question of: How does "Sunrise on the Reaping" illustrate the enforced metamorphosis of individuals at the hands of the Capitol? Using a literary analysis of the narrative voice, I will analyze Haymitch's first-person narrative voice to demonstrate the manipulation of identity through political force, focusing on key moments of tension in the narrative. Additionally, I will illustrate how Collins demonstrates the manipulative potential of spectacle and propaganda, which can be used to create both a transformation of an individual's identity as well as to influence public opinion about the actions of the State. (Orman, 2025)

Public Opinion And Propaganda

Propaganda and public opinion play a significant role in creating the illusion of stability while concealing the forced overwhelming Capitol's power. At the start of the novel *Sunrise on the Reaping*, Suzanne Collins places George Orwell's warning that "*All propaganda is lies, even when one is telling the truth. I don't think this matters so long as one knows what one is doing, and why.*" (Collins, 2) In contrast with traditional definitions of propaganda, Collins implies that propaganda has more to do with intention than with accuracy or truth. Once used for propagandic purposes, even if the words are factually accurate, they lose any sense of neutrality and thus become instruments of deception. The question is not whether a statement is "true" or "false," but why and how it has been stated. In this sense, propaganda signals the end of truthfulness because all meanings are distorted in service of power. (Aron 73) By beginning this work with an epigraph, Collins indicates that the reader should consider the entire text of the work through propaganda's ability to distort the truth. The facts remain unchanged; however, the meanings of those facts are altered by the propaganda to

serve a purpose other than their own. The use of imposing slogans and public ceremonies to solidify the state of power, as well as the Hunger Games, which have been reinterpreted as a sacred custom, provide evidence of this symbolic corruption of truth.

In the novel, holding the absolute authority, Capitol easily had the opportunity to manipulate the minds of the people in the districts. Through constant messaging, they portray themselves as the providers of order and sustenance following the chaos of the Dark Days, suggesting that without the Capitol's structure and "mercy," the districts would descend into ruin. This can be seen in the daily lives of the districts, most notably in the posters plastered across the town square during the reaping. Slogans like "NO PEACEKEEPERS, NO BREAD! NO PEACE, NO SECURITY! NO PEACEKEEPERS, NO PEACE! NO CAPITOL, NO PEACE."(Collins, 20) Citizens in the districts are instilled with an intuitive belief in the Capitol due to the overwhelming amount of messaging that comes from the Capitol. In essence, there is no peace without the safety that the Capitol offers through force. To maintain and control how the citizens perceive their relationship with the Capitol, the Capitol violently punishes anyone who goes against their established order. When individuals sing songs or tell stories that reveal how cruelly the Capitol rules, the Capitol seeks to stop these because they expose the Capitol's attempt to manipulate citizens into believing the Capitol is good. The Capitol often responds with extreme acts of violence, as was the case with Lenore Dove, who was arrested for singing a folk song that criticized the Capitol's injustice. The Capitol exerts complete control over how culture and the arts are produced, distributing punishment to any individual such as Lenore who seeks to tell the truth and produce authentic culture, so that citizens only know what is acceptable in accordance to the Capitol.

The psychological impact is increased by the manipulation of history, as highlighted by Haymitch's reflection that "*Most of the people in District 12 weren't even alive then, but*

we're sure here to pay the price." (Collins, 24) "Then" refers to the Dark Days, the failed rebellion against the Capitol that ended roughly 50 years ago at that time. "Now" refers to the current generation, including Haymitch and his peers, who are punished for a war they never fought in and a cause they have no connection. Novel shows psychological toll of the Capitol's coercion by showing how propaganda shapes not only thought but instinctive action. When Haymitch recalls how, at the command "*On the ground, on the ground, everybody now,*" people "*automatically fall on their knees and assume the position,*" (Collins, 27) this is reflexive, revealing how deeply repeated rituals of obedience have been embedded. This automatic compliance illustrates the erosion of autonomy, the body itself becomes an instrument of propaganda.

The propaganda, public opinion and influencing, opens another door for a major theme which is "*why submit to government.*" At the start of the novel, Lenore Dove sings a song: "*They hang the man and flog the woman. Who steals the goose from off the common. Yet let the greater villain loose. That steals the common from the goose.*" (Collins, 15) The song illustrates a society where when individuals steal, they will be punished but when a powerful person steals, no one will stand up against it. System punishes the weak and excuses the one with power. Plutarch Heavensbee interrogates this. He is talking to other tributes and Haymitch when he asks, "*why do you submit to it all?*" He reminds that tributes can outnumber peacekeepers, and they also have weapons like pickaxes, knife and some possibly explosives. This question of Plutarch makes Haymitch question, "*Why have people always agreed to it?*" Novel frames propaganda as a failure born from normalisation of oppression. Moreover, the same is within the arena itself, where "*everything that can be found is gorgeous,*" The Capitol uses beauty to lure tributes to believe that they are in a safe place, while simultaneously concealing their death behind its poison. Power resides in its ability to hide danger under safety. The way Maysilee and Haymitch use their own mannerisms and

behaviours to soothe the porcupine shows Capitol's manipulation of the tributes through the spectacles of the Hunger Games is similarly demonstrated. In each of these cases the violence shown is only one form of controlling aggression, that aggression has been controlled through premeditated distraction. Collins has created a framework of ideology that suggests that authoritarian regimes rely on the cultivation of a dependence upon their use of deceptive resources for controlling recipients through both a cultivation of fear and provision of deceptive means. For Haymitch, these moments confirm that the Capitol's true objective is creating a cycle experienced by both tributes and districts with their use of temporary forms of comfort that masks the means of their extermination from existing. (Koontz, 2025)

Media and Spectacle

Media is used by people for communication education sharing information and lots of many other things. When people with power gets control of this it becomes tool of propaganda, turning stories into instruments of influence and control. Within Sunrise on the Reaping, the Capitol serves as an exemplar of this model, they use the media as a means of broadcasting violence as a form of entertainment, censoring acts of rebellion, and scripting narratives that help preserve their legitimacy, creating a model where propaganda creates not only what we see, but also how we understand the world around us. Using Haymitch's internal struggles as an example, author demonstrates that one's ability to survive within the confines of Capitol's system does not only depend physical strength, but also the individual's ability to perform their role in a believable way for Capitol's entertainment value. When Woodbine Chance's panics and attempts to escape, as Haymitch observes, *“The screens go dark for a second and then the flag reappears. “Obviously, they don’t want the rest of the country to witness the disorder here in District 12.”*(Collins, 27) He realizes that the Panem flag reappearing on the screens is a form of censorship, meant to hide any signs of resistance from outside nations

and instead project an image of stability. This is because Capitol does not want this event to destroy the characteristics that they've built in Panem. In Panem, people are born into a system that teaches them to accept the Hunger Games as normal and necessary, meaning their compliance is shaped by conditioning rather than personal choice. This shows the forced transformation within the Panem itself not just at the districts.

Haymitch saving Lenore Dove is followed by Haymitch being violently pulled up and later labeled as 'replacement tribute' happened just for political convenience, confirms that Haymitch's selection as replacement for the Reaping isn't a random willful act, but rather a product of punishment and politics. This answers the research question, Haymitch's transformation is by the violence of transitioning from the citizen to the spectacle, Haymitch's identification is redefined by the Capitol's narrative and not subjectively. Haymitch's title 'replacement tribute' represents how the regime reshapes individuals into functional tools of propaganda it demonstrates that through the imposition of authoritarian systems, the right to determine one's own future becomes irrelevant and is supplanted through the forced role created by the state. His selection not being an act of chance symbolising how the regime's rituals are easily discarded when the spectacle of control is threatened. The Capitols use of Haymitch as a part of their resuming broadcast is a form of using the propaganda machine against itself. The television coverage of Haymitch's presence on television eliminates the rebellious actions of Woodbine and promotes the false idea of an orderly and fair reaping process. In Panem, "what happens" does not define the truth, but rather "what the Capitol broadcasts."

Plutarch's request for a recording of the reaction of the tributes' families is not a request for documentation, but rather an act of emotional harvesting. This system takes actual suffering and transforms it into something to watch and consume. It removes the personal significance

of the suffering and shapes it into entertainment for the Capitol and a means of control over the districts.

In forcing them to reenact their horror, “*gasps a little louder,*” “*call out his name,*” “*break into tears.*” (Collins,34) Plutarch explains how the state sees its people not only as physical beings who they control, but rather as multiple sources of feelings and emotions which the state can use to benefit from. The actions taken by Capitol to try and control not just the actions of people but also the way in which people are allowed to express themselves is one of the most extreme measures of oppression. The totality of suffering that Capitol wants to be able to use to maintain their power, and force people not to speak out against them will create a system of totalitarian control that has one ruler imposing harsh penalties, constant monitoring and punishment, so that people will comply but at the same time teach people to accept this type of control as normal and therefore change individual behaviour so as not to experience any of the consequences of breaking these rules, but then not even having any objections or opposition to the means of their oppression.

The staged birthday party on the train also demonstrates that the Capitol controls and manipulates the forced transformation of people. The staged birthday party is not a true act of generosity or kindness it is simply another carefully orchestrated production meant to show the Capitol's false sense of generosity. Tibby and the cakes create an artificial narrative of goodness and generosity that hides the brutality of coercing Haymitch into becoming a tribute. This moment shows how Haymitch's identity is transformed, he goes from being a grieving, humiliated to becoming a useable persona for public consumption. The staged birthday party attempts to force Haymitch to be grateful for the Capitol's "loving acts," thus rewriting and creating a new reality for him to accept as valid in front of the citizens of Panem. Through Haymitch's eyes, however, he sees the fake nature and cruelty of the event.

By showing this, Collins exposes how totalitarian governments force people to create and maintain identities that support their message of propaganda and the forced transformation Collins demonstrates in this story.

He understands immediately that this participation is meant to create a clip for broadcast, to show Panem's people *"Look how well the Capitol treats the tributes. How forgiving they are to their enemies. How superior they are to those district piglets in their stinkholes."* (Collins, 48) And in that moment Haymitch remembers what his father said to another tribute before, *"Don't let them use you, Sarshee. Don't let them paint their posters with your blood. Not if you can help it."* (Collins, 48) He denies them the footage of a grateful, happy tribute, understanding that to accept their false gift would be to betray the very truth of his situation, The event symbolises the Capitol's desire to commodify every aspect of a tribute's existence, even their most personal milestones, and turn it into content that reinforces their power narrative.

Capitol transports all the tributes to prepare for their opening ceremonies, but as the event gets under way, Louella McCoy, is thrown from the district's chariot and dies instantly. The Capitol's treatment of Louella embodies the repression of individuality. This death no longer allows Louella to be an individual human being instead she becomes an object of inconvenience that the Capitol will replace. This shows how the Capitol manipulates and controls even the meaning of death. They also changed Louella's personality by replacing her with a child brought in to fill her spot, who is made to believe she is Louella. Louella's immediate replacement demonstrates that Capitol doesn't value individual human lives. This exemplifies the Capitol's perspective that tributes are simply components of a show rather than human beings. It also shows how easy it is for a group with power to change an individuals mind. For Haymitch, this demonstration illustrates that the Capitol places a higher

value on the continuation of the spectacle than on the lives of the individuals involved.(Chandupatla)

As the games continue Haymitch realises that the Capitol responds more to entertainment than to morality. By showing the Capitol audience that he is a “rascal”, as opposed to someone with intelligence, dignity, or restraint, he is demonstrating the fact that in Panem, survival often depends more on performance than authenticity. In this instance, by presenting himself as a “rascal” who is sarcastic, reckless, and slightly defiant, Haymitch allows himself to become something that the Capitol’s audience will find to be entertaining and will not want to destroy. By exaggerating his flaws and adopting a persona, Haymitch uses the same media system that is attempting to control him to create a new image. Collins suggests that even this self-created image is still a form of forced transformation therefore, Haymitch is still being influenced by the Capitol and being forced to create a new persona for the sake of survival. Symbolically, the rascal persona becomes a form of controlled self distortion, showing how individuals reshape themselves within oppressive systems not to comply fully, but to survive without surrendering their inner truth. (“Sunrise on the Reaping,” 2025)

Class disparity and Inequality

Class distinction is an important theme that shapes Panem. There isn’t only a class difference between Capitol and Districts but there is also a class distinction going on between the districts on their own and the Capitol on its own as well. This can be seen clearly in the disparity between the "Career" districts and less affluent ones, such as 12. Readers discover through Haymitch's perspective that Districts 1, 2, and 4 are referred to as the "Career" districts because the children in these areas are taught from a young age to participate in the Hunger Games as a career choice rather than a punishment. According to Haymitch, these tributes arrive at the reaping “*gleaming like trophies,*” wearing expensive clothes and

carrying themselves like *"little soldiers drilled to march"* They are powerful opponents in the arena because they have been given enough food to be physically strong and trained in their use of weapons prior to being chosen for the Games. Therefore, tributes from Districts like district 12 will be unprepared and fearful than their Capitol counterparts. In addition, because the Capitol continues to starve and neglect the outer districts as they continue to support the inner districts in training their tributes, they have a pipeline of performers for their own entertainment through this disparity of treatment between the districts. This treatment disparity causes children from different districts to behave as if they are supported by a poise of power, whereas children from the outer districts are treated as if they are subhuman by comparison. The disparity between districts creates a difference in their acts. The class distinction between the districts and the Capitol is shown to each of the districts on almost a daily basis. In addition, every reaping day the Capitol uses the square's video feeds to publicly display the Capitol's power through the images they post to promote fear before the reaping *"armies of marching Peacekeepers, airborne fleets of hovercraft, tanks."* The display of military power rather than the celebration of culture and the description of all items as "clean," "expensive," and "deadly" serves to reinforce the Capitol's technological advancement as well as its ability to commit acts of violence. Capitol's expense serves as a constant reminder that it hoards resources while the districts starve. If everything were equal in the Capitol and the districts, there would be many differences between their characteristics. The difference in class creates a difference in behavior due to the resulting power inequities and access to resources. People from lower classes generally have to be more cautious and compliant with their behavior because they have limited options and making mistakes often result in severe consequences. People from higher classes generally exhibit higher self-esteem or more controlling behavior since they probably feel insulated by their station in life. The result of these differences frequently leads to fear, tension and competition among those

of differing classes, making inequality seem "normal" among those within the particular class. (Macionis, 2021)

Novel deepens critique of the forced transformation by showing how tributes are physically dehumanised upon arrival in the Capitol. District children are put into a public gym and *“hosed down with a stinging insecticide” “strong enough to make their skin burn.”* Their clothes, the last markers of their homes and identities, are seized and incinerated *“like contaminated rags.”* Capitol attendants in masks and gloves handle the tributes *“as if they are infested animals”* this shows how Capitols propaganda effects the people's opinion, they make people in Panem believe district people are dirty and inhumane as if they are not the same. These alterations are taught to both districts and Capitol to let all of them act in order. Examples of how this forced alteration has affected both the residents of the Capitol and those in the various districts. While some residents of the Capitol have trouble recognizing tributes as being human, they tend to think of themselves as being better than the tributes from other districts. For example, Effie Trinket frequently feels sorry for many tributes; she also believes that the residents of the districts are guilty of having committed treason against the capital and deserve to continue suffering by way of punishment. This indicates that Effie's point of view is shaped by her upbringing the Capitol culture as opposed to actually being her viewpoint. This connects directly to the research question, that the Capitol imposes forced transformation upon all individuals, regardless of whether those individuals are being oppressed. The system changes how people think, what they believe is right, and how they understand violence. In this way, Collins shows that under the Capitol's control, identity and truth are shaped by power, and both the districts and the Capitol are taught to accept this controlled version of reality.

Conclusion

Sunrise on the Reaping, by Suzanne Collins, explores the process of erasing, replacing, and performing the forced change of people being controlled by the Capitol through the use of symbols. Haymitch uses his own experience as a way to show how the actual violence committed by the government is not just the act of physically hurting someone but also the way in which this violence is depicted through the use of propaganda and by the media. Examples of manipulation in a controlled setting include manipulating a person's appearance, censoring a person's death and filming a person's emotional reaction due to outside influence. These are examples of the regime turning a human life into an aesthetic image and reinforcing their power through controlling both reality and how people see reality. Haymitch's narration also provides examples of counter-symbols. For example, Haymitch refusing to turn Louella's body over to the Capitol. This demonstrates the attempt to maintain dignity, humanity, and truth in the world created by those in power to destroy all three.

With its rapid crackdown on any unscripted moments, the Capitol continues to re-establish itself as the dominant political power through their ability to quickly and easily remove people from power without any accountability. Ultimately, *Sunrise on the Reaping* shows us that individuals who are forcibly transformed into someone else under the authority and control of the Capitol are, in fact, going through the process of having their personal identities stripped away and replaced with new identities or the rewriting of their personal identity via media to create propaganda; thus demonstrating how one maintains power not only through the use of force, but also through manipulation or redeployment of meaning.

References

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press, 1984.

Macionis, John J. *Sociology*. 16th ed., Pearson, 2021.

Koontz, Gavin. ““Sunrise on the Reaping”: Review and Analysis.” *Tiger Times*, 5 Apr. 2025, <https://fisherstigertimes.com/2025/04/sunrise-on-the-reaping-review-and-analysis/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2026.

Orman, T. (2025, March 20). Book review: *Sunrise on the reaping* by Suzanne Collins. *Hunger Games Lessons*. <https://www.hungergameslessons.com/2025/03/book-review-sunrise-on-reaping-by.html>. Accessed 3 March 2026

Aron, Raymond. *Democracy and Totalitarianism*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968.

“Sunrise on the Reaping: A Hunger Games Novel That Redefines the Arena.” *The Literary Compass*, <https://theliterarycompass.com/book-review/sunrise-on-the-reaping/>. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

Suzanne Collins. *Sunrise on the Reaping*. Scholastic Press, 2025.

Chandupatla, Tanmayee. “We Believed the Lie Too: How *Sunrise on the Reaping* Uses Propaganda on Readers.” *HerCampus*, last week, www.hercampus.com/school/tamu/we-believed-the-lie-too-how-sunrise-on-the-reaping-uses-propaganda-on-readers. Access 3 March 2026.

