Name_____ Period_____

The Hunger Games

Exploring Expository Writing: Author Biography
Internet Activity—Suzanne Collins

What is your favorite novel of all times? In the space below, write the name of the novel and a one-sentence explanation telling why you love it.

Share what you wrote with a classmate. What do your answers have in common?

Perhaps you picked your favorite book because it is surprising or unusual. Maybe the author came up with a new idea, clever characters, or amazing events that made this book a "must read" for you. Where do these great ideas that authors get come from and what can you learn from them? If only it were as easy as turning on a light bulb the way we see in cartoons! Novelists come up with original ideas the same way everyone else does – by thinking creatively, putting ideas together in new ways, drawing on past experiences, and looking at the world differently.

Your teacher may want to post your favorite book title in the classroom. Using book recommendations from classmates is a great way to find new books to read and different genres that you might not otherwise try.

Suzanne Collins's Novel Idea

As a child, Suzanne Collins loved myths – in particular, she loved the myth of Theseus. In this myth, as a punishment for past wrongdoing, the citizens of Athens are forced to send their children as tributes to Crete. There they will fight the Minotaur – a monster they had no hope of defeating.

Collins was fascinated by the idea of a society so powerful and cruel that it could force another society to give up its children, sacrificing them as retribution for past crimes. Her fascination with the myth helped shape her idea for the novel *The Hunger Games*.

The idea came about one evening as Collins was "channel surfing." She switched between two programs: one was about a group of teenagers competing for prizes, and the other program was about teenagers fighting in a war. As Collins flipped from one channel to the other, she asked a question many great writers ask: what if? What if children competed in games to the death like Roman gladiators did? What if a government controlled citizens by randomly selecting their children to participate in a brutal game that could only have one winner? What if a girl took her little sister's place in this fight to the death; could she survive?

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By combining her channel surfing experience and her childhood fascination with the Theseus myth, Suzanne Collins created a story idea that has captured the interest of many, many readers.

Collins's writing career began in 1991 when she started writing for children's television shows. She had been working on TV scripts for several years when a fellow writer encouraged her to try writing a novel. Her first book was *Gregor the Overlander*. It's the first book in a series of five novels that tell the story of a boy who discovers a world underneath the streets of New York City.

Themes

Both *The Underland Series* and *The Hunger Games* deal with themes of war. Perhaps that is because Collins's father was in the Air Force, and he fought in the Vietnam War. As a child, Collins was aware of the war; she sometimes saw scenes of it on the evening news. Although she was a young child at the time, those images and thoughts stayed with her and influenced her ideas while she was writing *The Hunger Games.*

In the novel, the citizens of the fictional North American country of the future called Panem are forced to watch the scenes of the Hunger Games on TV as the contestants battle to the death. The theme of TV as entertainment, regardless of what is on the TV is something Collins finds troublesome. She is concerned that TV viewers may be becoming "desensitized" to the horrors of war that they see on television. In *The Hunger Games*, death becomes entertainment. Today, it is easy to think that all TV is entertainment and forget that some things, like wars and starvation, are real events that happen to real people. The problems those people face don't go away once the television is turned off.

As you read *The Hunger Games,* notice how television is used in the Games and by the government.

The "What If" Factor

Look back at the favorite book you wrote about at the beginning of this activity. Why is it your favorite? Is it because of memorable characters, an exciting plot, or a surprising chain of events? What is the "what if" question the author considered in writing the book?

As readers, we enjoy the "what if" questions because we know the answer is going to be complex and interesting. We're never sure which way a story will turn or how it will end – just like in real life.

Name_____ Period_____

Comprehension Check: Exploring Expository Writing

1. How did Suzanne Collins's reading interests as a child influence her writing as an adult?

2. Explain how an experience watching TV influenced her idea for writing *The Hunger Games*.

3. What do you think Collins means when she states she's worried that people have become "desensitized" by what they see on TV?

4. Do you agree that TV desensitizes people? Why or why not?

5. How might her father's experiences with the Vietnam War influence how Suzanne Collins writes about war?

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