

Mockingjay and monitoring minors

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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My daughter came home from school—elementary school—reading a book that she absolutely could not put down. Then she starts telling me the plot. “Kids kill one another.”

I held my chest. “What? Wait. You can’t read that.”

But she had read it. It was *The Hunger Games* and she pretty much devoured all the pages before I could lift a finger to protest. So, I did the only thing I know to do as a mother. I picked up the pages and entered the world with her, so I could speak the language of the Districts and the Capital.

As I finished the books, I thought about the conversations I had with my conservative Christian friends who (with great futility) banned *Harry Potter* from their children’s shelves. I would explain that Jo Rowling’s minister would babysit her child so that she could finish her manuscript. “The books are not anti-Christian,” I’d tell them. “You’ll learn it’s quite the opposite if you would just *read them*.”

In much the same way, *The Hunger Games* is not glorifying violence. It’s quite the opposite, if we read them.

Now, it’s been five years, and we have been reading, rereading, watching, and re-watching the movies. My daughter is a teenager now, and each year the work has brought out something different. Our conversations have grown deeper. We saw *Hunger Games* and talked about how the districts were based on the Roman government, and the whole notion of the crucifixion and the coliseums became clearer.

We watched *Catching Fire* in the midst of Ferguson protest--the images of the tanks and “peacekeepers” flooding into the districts looked eerily familiar. The segregation was startling.

Since we've seen the first *Mockingjay*, we've been discussing North Korea.

I wrote [a book on violence](#) with Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, where we struggled with whether we should let our kids see violent entertainment. *Hunger Games* lurked in the back of my mind when I was writing. I couldn't clearly say "no." I would have been a hypocrite. Plus, I cannot deny that the books have opened up doors into complex ideas of pacifism, pragmatism, liberation, and oppression. Yes, there is violence, but it seemed to have served an important purpose--at least in our home.

We saw the movie the day it came out. The Capital's cruelty has increased, but the major theme seems to be the violence that war has on individuals. There is no glossing over the torment the victors have to endure. Posttraumatic stress and moral injury haunt the war's poster children.

The acting is brutally good. I miss Philip Seymour Hoffman's great range and complex brilliance. We have come to expect Jennifer Lawrence to throw herself into the role, and she doesn't disappoint. The surprise, for me, was Josh Hutcherson. He wears his torment with a soul-crushing messiness.

As a parent, it is a struggle to know what to do when one of the most compelling stories on war is young adult fiction. Since YA Lit is growing (while other genres recede), it has become a refuge for many creative authors. And teens (as well as adults) seem to be enamoured by dystopian visions. As Christians, these just might be our prophets. Yet, we need to continue to hold these messages in a space of hope.