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Reacting to The Future: An Immersive Experience with The Hunger Games

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Reacting to the Future:
An Immersive Experience with *The Hunger Games*

Background: This assignment was designed as part of the Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy FLC for New Large Lecture Literature GE Courses. During this FLC, community members researched and discussed best practices for large lectures in order to develop course outlines and/or assignments for newly created English courses.

This assignment was designed for an ENG 1120 Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction, Horror, Fantasy course that would focus on Dystopian Literature. Dystopian literature is a genre of Speculative Fiction that often features a postapocalyptic future and offers social and political commentary. Some examples of dystopian literature include George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series.

This assignment asks students to immerse themselves in the world of *The Hunger Games* and incorporates elements of the *Reacting to the Past* (*Reacting*) pedagogy. Generally speaking, *Reacting* pedagogy requires students to immerse themselves in a specific historical context and participate in a role-play game (RPG) based on that context. The game is unscripted and student-centered/directed; interactions must be in-character and period appropriate. More on the pedagogical elements on *Reacting to the Past* can be found here: <https://reacting.barnard.edu/>

Justification and Purpose: Immersive activities such as *Reacting* and other gamification strategies boost student engagement, even, arguably especially, in large lecture situations. This assignment will require students to immerse themselves in Panem—the society in *The Hunger Games*—and work together to sponsor Tributes, form alliances and gameplay strategies in the Arena, and other related activities. Ideally, as they come to see the structures within Panem and the worldbuilding Collins does in the first novel, students will be able to see parallels within current U.S. and global cultures, analyze their own contributions to the simulation, and better appreciate and articulate what goes into fiction writing.

Assignment Assumptions:

- Instructor is generally familiar with RPG and/or *Reacting* pedagogy
- ENG 1120 course with focus on dystopia
 - Course materials include both *The Hunger Games* novel and movie adaptation
 - Course could focus solely on *The Hunger Games* series but does not have to
- 120 students (can be scaled up or down as appropriate) This allows for 10 students per District. If needed or desired, the instructor can assign a group of students to be Gamemakers or Spectators to allow for more groups/different experiences. Flexibility is key for this assignment!
- Students have read the book and watched the movie (collective or independent screening is up to the instructor).
- Class discussions about the book and movie have occurred, with an eye toward this assignment.

Assignment Parameters: Please note that this section is deliberately skeletal in places to allow for instructor adaptation and refinement.

Assignment Instructions to Students

You are now a citizen of Panem and have been assigned to your District's Hunger Games Committee (small group) As part of this Committee, you will represent and sponsor your District's two Tributes for the upcoming Hunger Games. There is no escaping your District. Do not attempt to do so. This will have consequences on your entire District.

The instructor will represent the Capitol and the Gamemakers and will be your only liaison to the Capitol until the Games begin. Once the Games begin, one member of each Committee will be invited to the Capitol to represent your District's interests on a rotating basis. This means that you cannot send the same person to the Capitol each day. See the "Game Day" section for more information.

Your Committee will have four tasks as outlined below.

Task #1: Promoting your District

You need to research and promote understanding of your District. This will require you to go back to *The Hunger Games* texts (book and movie) to see how your District is represented. District 12, don't think you have it easy. You will create a stand-alone visual essay that both gives vital information about your District and entices those in the Capitol to sponsor your Tribute(s). Until the Games begin, you must equally promote both Tributes.

Task #2: Tribute Dossier

You will need to create a brief dossier for both of your District's Tributes. This dossier should include name, age, height, weight, skills, expertise, weaknesses, and other attributes as required on the Tribute Dossier checklist. Your Tribute should accurately reflect your District and its advantages and disadvantages based on what we know from *The Hunger Games*. In other words, not every District is going to have Career Tributes. To ensure some accuracy, some RPG elements (dice rolls or drawing numbers/lots) will be required. You will need a male and female Tribute.

Task #3: Game Play

Happy Hunger Games! On the designated Game Play days, the entire class period will be given over to the spectacle of the Hunger Games.

- At least one member of each District Committee will come to the Capitol to advocate for their Tributes on a rotating basis. The same person cannot represent the District twice in a row.
- Other members of each committee will be designated as "Spectators" and will be unable to influence game play. This number may change each Game Day per instructor discretion. It is possible that all Committee members other than Tributes may be Spectators for at least part of the Game Play day.
- One Committee member will play a Tribute. If your District has two Tributes in play, you will need two Committee members for this. The Tribute Committee member should not

change (unless absent for class). Once a Tribute, always a Tribute. The Tribute cannot come to the Capitol to advocate.

- The Gamemakers (instructor) will offer information as to the weather and other conditions of the Arena and Tributes for each day. Gamemakers can change up the Games at any time.
- Each Game Play day will result in Tribute deaths. Once Tributes “die,” they become Spectators for the remainder of the Games unless otherwise needed by the Gamemakers.
- More specifics on Game Play will be given as needed.

Task #4: Reflective Essay Collection

Your Committee will turn in a collective reflective essay collection. After Game Play has ended and there is either a single winner of *The Hunger Games* or every Tribute has died, each member of the Committee will write a maximum 500 word essay reflecting on your experiences. A specific prompt will be given. Essays will be housed on Google Docs and must be submitted under each District’s folder according to the instructions on the Reflective Essay Collection Assignment sheet.

Timeline: Including time for reading the book, viewing the movie, and discussing both, this assignment could occupy up to 5 weeks of a semester. The assignment/immersion could take the entire semester if the course focuses solely on *The Hunger Games* series and could be done differently with each book. I recommend allowing up two weeks for Game Play.

Assessment: This is at instructor’s discretion. Generally, game play itself is not graded. The oral and written communication during game play can be noted, but it is the promotional materials, the Tribute dossiers, and reflective essays that carry the most weight. There will be some group assessments and individual assessments.