Student Name

Ms. Hammond

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The Role of Sacrifice in *The Hunger Games*

Love is a powerful emotion that can often lead people to make drastic choices in their lives. Human beings feel a sense of loyalty towards the ones they love and, therefore, are willing to commit selfless acts of bravery to preserve their loved ones’ happiness. In Suzanne Collin’s novel *The Hunger Games*, the two protagonists – Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, both teenagers living in a dangerous, dog-eat-dog, dystopian world, make several sacrifices to better and even save the lives of those they love. Peeta risks his safety to help feed Katniss and her family when they are starving, (1) Katniss elects to take her sister’s place in The Hunger Games (2), and ultimately, at the end of the Hunger Games, both Katniss and Peeta are willing to offer up their own lives in an attempt to save each other. (3) **Through these characters’ actions, Collins communicates that true bravery is the result of selflessness and the willingness to endure supreme sacrifice.**

Years prior to the annual Hunger Games that take place in the novel, Peeta Mellark helps feed Katniss and her family during a time when they were facing starvation. At the time, Katniss’s father had been killed in a sudden mining accident, leaving Katniss, her younger sister, and their mother without a stable income. As a result, Katniss and her family were “slowly starving” (Collins 25). Though Katniss did not know it at the time, Peeta had always cared about her from afar, so when she appeared outside his family’s bakery desperate for food, he disobeyed his mother’s orders to toss the burned bread to the pigs and tossed it to Katniss instead. Upon reflecting on the incident, Katniss explains that “It didn’t occur to [her] until the next morning that the boy might have burned the bread on purpose. Might have dropped the loaves into the flames, knowing it meant being punished, and then delivered them to [her]” (Collins 28). For Katniss, Peeta shows bravery by disobeying his mother, first by purposely burning two loaves of bread, making them unsellable, then by tossing the loaves to Katniss instead of the pigs. He risks being brutally punished by both the Peacekeepers (since it is illegal to feed the poor) and his own mother, showing his willingness to sacrifice his own well-being for someone he cares about. **Like Peeta, Katniss is also willing to risk her wellbeing for the ones she loves.**

At the beginning of the novel, Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take her sister, Prim’s, place at the annual Hunger Games, a televised death match that will most likely result in her death. Katniss is willing to take Prim’s place because of her deep and everlasting love for little sister. When Prim is announced as a competitor in this year’s Hunger Games Katniss describes her reaction: “I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me. ‘I volunteer!” I gasp. ‘I volunteer as tribute!” (Collins 23). Katniss instinctively raises her hand to volunteer, without even thinking about it. Her love for her sister is so deep that she does not even take time to consider the consequences of her choice. She could, ultimately, die in the Hunger Games but to her, the risk is worth it if it means saving the life of her beloved sister. Because of this, Katniss embodies true bravery because she is willing to endure sleeplessness, starvation, injury, cruelty, and perhaps death – all within the public eye – in order to protect her sister from the same fate.

The kindness Peeta paid Katniss after her father died comes full circle when, at the end of the Hunger Games, both Peeta and Katniss struggle with the decision of who will remain the sole survivor – not out of love for themselves, but out of love for each other. Once all other the other competitors have been killed, Peeta begs Katniss to kill him so that she can return to her family. He knows how important Prim is to Katniss and he is willing to die so that the sisters can be reunited. As all of Panem watches, Peeta turns to Katniss and says “Listen… we both know [Gamemakers] have to have a victor. It can only be one of us. Please, take it. For me” (Collins 338). Peeta’s everlasting love for Katniss enables him to make the ultimate sacrifice – his life. He is willing to give up his own future, his family, and his entire existence for Katniss. Katniss could easily take Peeta up on his offer, become the winner, and return home to her family. However, during their time together, she has developed a strong kinship to Peeta. Because of her affection for him, Katniss is unwilling to accept his sacrifice, maintaining that “if [Peeta] dies, I’ll never go home. Not really” (Collins 338). She has become so close to Peeta that she views him as a key part of her definition of what “home” is, and so, she risks her own life in hopes of saving both of theirs. Rather than kill Peeta and take the victory for herself, Katniss comes up with a plan that could result in them both being crowned victors. Her plan requires them both to eat poisonous berries and hope that the Gamemakers step in to save them at the last moment, before it’s too late (Collins 339). Katniss’s unwillingness to accept Peeta’s sacrifice, combined with the bravery she demonstrates by eating the poisonous berries shows her sacrifice. During their time within the games together, the two characters develop a bond that proves to be unbreakable by the end of the novel. It is this bond that leads to their decision to risk their own lives to save one another, and this sacrifice that leads to their survival in the end.

Love can be a powerful motivator that pushes people to the boundaries of their character. Throughout her novel, Suzanne Collins illuminates the extreme risks people are willing to take for the ones they love, and through her characters, seems to suggest that true bravery stems directly from this risk-taking behaviour. Both Peeta and Katniss make radically selfless decisions in an attempt to save their loved ones, proving that love can turn any ordinary person into a hero.

Works Cited

Collins, Suzanne. The Hunger Games. New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. Print.