

## **Merit of English Section**

### **Senior Division**

**Name of Winner: Ngai Wang Ching**

**Name of school: Pui Ching Middle School**

**Book title: Mockingjay**

**Author: Suzanne Collins**

**Publisher: Scholastic**

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“If we burn, you burn with us.”

Published in 2010, *Mockingjay* was instantaneously heralded as a pioneering work of science fiction, garnering omnipresent attention. The book sang of a revolutionary tale taking place in Panem, a land full of disparity.

It is a time when personages live an extravagant and profligate life in the Capitol, while the inconspicuous perpetuation of poverty, at least in the eyes of the eminences, are left to rot. It is a time when heinous acts - the methodical massacre of children are carried out to squelch the Districts' population for the rebellious deeds of their ancestors. However, it is also the time the harrowing ramifications of unbridled, bubbling hate starts to appear - a revolution of the people, triggered by their hero and mockingjay - Katniss Everdeen.

The novel revolves around its title - Mockingjay - literally. The mockingjay is the side product of the Capitol's abortive attempt to conduct espionage activities on the insubordinate districts long ago. Since then, the bird has served as a reminder of the Capitol's failure in the sanguinary revolution, as precisely described by Katniss - "something of a slap in the face to the Capitol". Throughout the entirety of this

masterpiece, the mockingjay is a symbol of defiance which rekindles the rebels' memory of their despondent past, and more crucially, fuels their ardent enthusiasm to put an end to the Capitol's authoritarian rule.

Katniss Everdeen is, originally, an ordinary girl living an ordinary life. Yet, her normal, notwithstanding fulfilling life comes to a screeching, irrevocable halt as she is chosen for massacre. More is to come as the country is preparing for an impending civil war. She, lamentably, has, perhaps, the most treacherous war to wage on her own, a war with her arch-enemy - President Snow, a politician whose enormity and corruption is hidden under a friendly façade. His breath smells of blood from his opponents to the presidency. His tepid smile and his slit-shaped eyes are as cold as winter's ice.

To Katniss, her dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and brutally derided, but the dignity of the people, especially the vulnerable may never, ever be stripped away. Following the bombing of hospitals, she was so incandescent at the Capitol, she has that burning desire to unveil, once and for all, the pure evilness of the Capitol to the whole of Panem, to stir up such a monumental revolution of the people to overthrow the seemingly incontestable power of the authoritarian regime. She stood, with grace, confidence and posture beyond belief, facing the cameras, imagining herself looking directly at the hostile eyes of the President, aiming the blow of words at him with deadly accuracy - as aforementioned, “Fire is catching. If we burn, you burn with us”, edifying all among the ranks of the rebels, playing a requisite role in the outcome of the rebels becoming the victorious side.

Personally, in retrospect, I have always thought that taking on an immortal enemy would always be higher on my to-do list than to fight a friend. It is disheartening to see Gale's fervent desire for vicious vengeance build up an impassable palisade between Katniss and him. Following the death of Primrose, Katniss's sister, from a bombing ordered by Gale as a plan to further alienate the people of the Capitol, a painful and heart-rending confrontation between them ended in melancholy.

Collins has delved into the deepest and darkest depths of humanity, evidenced by the themes of callousness and revenge in the book. Yet, she has simultaneously injected hope in the story that despite the grim outlook of things, the ability to sacrifice is not only unblemished, but shining even more brightly in the chasm of darkness.

The novel details the civil war as bloodshed. Day after night, night after day, the horrific executions of rebels are broadcasted to the whole of Panem to watch, to cry in delight or to weep in despair. Rebels advancing to the Capitol were mercilessly killed, wave by wave, by wicked killing devices manufactured by the Capitol. Districts with a population of thousands were being obliterated, hospitals with children indiscriminately reduced to rubble.

Seemingly dramatic, regrettably, though, it is the stark reality for many out there. The blazing fire of war is spreading at the speed of lightning while we are living our everyday lives, enjoying a steaming Cappuccino, typing up this entry. Reading this book, I utterly and truly understand how a full-fledged war would look like. Destruction. Carnage. Thousands of deaths. It really prompts me to reflect that, instead of maintaining a façade of peace just like the power-

hungry President Coin did, we should do everything within our sphere of influence and power to ameliorate the plight of the citizens of the nations at war, from writing letters of encouragement to donating to related funds, or simply spreading awareness. No matter how miniscule we believe our actions to be, we could mirror the spirit of the mockingjay, to spread the news of peace, to smooth and calm disoriented and ravaged souls.

Yet, in both fiction and reality, one profound message stands out. Just like the Greek myth, hope, being the last thing in Pandora's box, acts as humanity's last barrier from doom, our greatest guardian, allowing us, and also the rebels in the story to appreciate the fact that, although all sorts of evil continues to wage an eternal war with the rebels and us, hope still remains.

Even President Snow recognises this, evidenced by his remark, “Hope is the only thing stronger than fear”.

Fighting force with force, violence with violence never works, painfully evidenced by Gale, whose attempt to alienate the people and the dignitaries of the Capitol not only ends in debacle, but also stripped Katniss of one she loves dearly. On the flip side, Primrose chose another path. She treated the wounds of the Capitol children indiscriminately. By being magnanimous to her foes, she fought hatred with love, warming the hearts of many men and women.

It is the love of people that bought Primrose in the midst of a battlefield to treat the wounded. It is also this love for people that inevitably leads her to the ever-welcoming arms of death. Is her death doleful? Surely. But is it regrettable and despairing? Surely not. Primrose did not die in vain. She died



a martyr, not for glory and accolades, but in hopes that her actions could shape a better Panem. This is incontrovertible evidence that hope and sacrifice are intertwined.

Suzanne Collins has yet created a world we can delve into for many hours where everything is so realistic in essence, yet still profoundly enthralling. Every character in the book, main or supporting, is so intricately and delicately written, making an indelible impression on me. While serving as a candid portrayal of the atrocities of a civil war, compounded by numerous inconceivable tragedies, it is entirely void of any cloying sentiment and cliché melodrama.

This New York Times Bestseller is one of a kind, inclusive of a quintessential blend of wisdom for all walks of life and an ample share of stirring and heart-wrenching stories. This is a masterpiece that one definitely must not miss.

