When people or institutions start to look oppressive, many reach for an analogy to George Orwell's 1984. But The Hunger Games? In fact, the latest installment from this teen fantasy franchise, The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1, has become much more than a conversation piece. Released on November 21st, 2014, just four days before the grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri decided not to issue an indictment in the case of Officer Darren Wilson's shooting of Michael Brown, Mockingjay has led to protests inspired by the film. Overnight, graffiti appeared on a Saint Louis monument with the words "If we burn, you will burn with us." In a video that has gone viral, a young woman sings the "Hanging Tree" song from the film, with an American flag in the background and lyrics altered to describe events in Missouri. In this MediaLit Moment, your middle and high school students will have the chance to develop a greater understanding of the power of social commentary in popular media, and greater awareness of different ways that audiences can be affected.

Ask students to discuss the emotional impact of Mockingjay, and how different audiences have reacted differently

AHA!: A movie can emotionally stir and energize people to rally for a cause in real life!

Grade Level: 8-10
Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.


You may want to screen Laci Green's MTV video on the parallels between Mockingjay and events in Ferguson (readily available on YouTube). Much of it is excellent. You will need to be selective, however. Not all of the content will be appropriate for students. And, for discussion of audience differences, you'll find a ready supply of social media content--especially on Tumblr and the rest of the blogosphere--with differing interpretations of the political significance of the film. Tweets with the hashtag #MyHungerGames may also be of interest.

Activity: Ask students whether they've seen the film. For those who have, what events or conflicts in the film had the greatest emotional impact for them? Why?
Do they see the government oppression in the film reflected in real life? Make sure to reinforce classroom norms during this discussion, as students may well disagree with each other. Have students listen to part or all of the NPR story. Make sure to include the author's comment (in the final minute of the story) about political polarization in the U.S. and the tendency to "paint our enemies as larger than life." Use the social media content to demonstrate the variety of audience reactions and responses to Mockingjay, and ask them to reflect on different responses among students in the room.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2014, Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.com