

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Vietnam has sometimes been called the “television war.” By the 1960s, most Americans had TV sets in their homes. There were only three major channels, and programming was relatively limited. But there was no shortage of news, and in the 1960s the big news was Vietnam. As a child, Collins remembered the distinct break between watching afternoon cartoons and then seeing the grim realities of wartime Vietnam. Fast forward thirty-five years, and the countries had changed—it was now the United States and Iraq—but the basic story remained the same. It was war, after all: the plotline boiled down to people killing one another.

By this time, however, the medium of television had also changed. Three

channels had mushroomed into hundreds. A few scripted television shows had exploded into a confusing array of dramas, comedies, news, talk shows, movies, and—increasingly in the 1990s and 2000s—“reality TV.” It was the perfect recipe for channel surfing, that restless search to find something compelling enough to watch.

BLURRING LINES

That was what Collins found herself doing one evening. Lying in bed, tired, with the remote control in her hand, she started flipping back and forth between two channels. One showed video from the Iraq War. The other was a reality show. Collins can’t even remember what they were competing for—money, maybe, or a bachelor. It didn’t matter. Their quest was trivial compared to the real battle happening on the other channel.

But as she watched, the two arenas began to blur. On her TV screen, they were both the same size, in color, and readily available. But Collins realized that one was frighteningly real, even if it did come as a series of sound bites, whereas the other was a collection of events edited to look like reality. Collins became concerned that viewers, especially young ones, might have trouble distinguishing between what was real and what was not. “[In the war], those are real people on the screen,



Romantic moments abound in *The Bachelor*, a reality television show in which a single man meets several women who compete to become the one he will choose as his permanent partner.

and they're not going away when the commercials start to roll," she told *School Library Journal*.

It was an unsettling experience for Collins. The pictures on the television were crystal clear, but their meanings were disturbingly blurry. That moment planted the seed for the premise of her next book, *The Hunger Games*. What if war was a competition? What if the atrocities of war were repackaged to become simply the things one does to get ahead in a game? It was then that Katniss's story came to her.

DRAWING FROM MYTHOLOGY

Although the inspiration for *The Hunger Games* came from the modern phenomenon of television, Collins returned to much older times to flesh out the story.