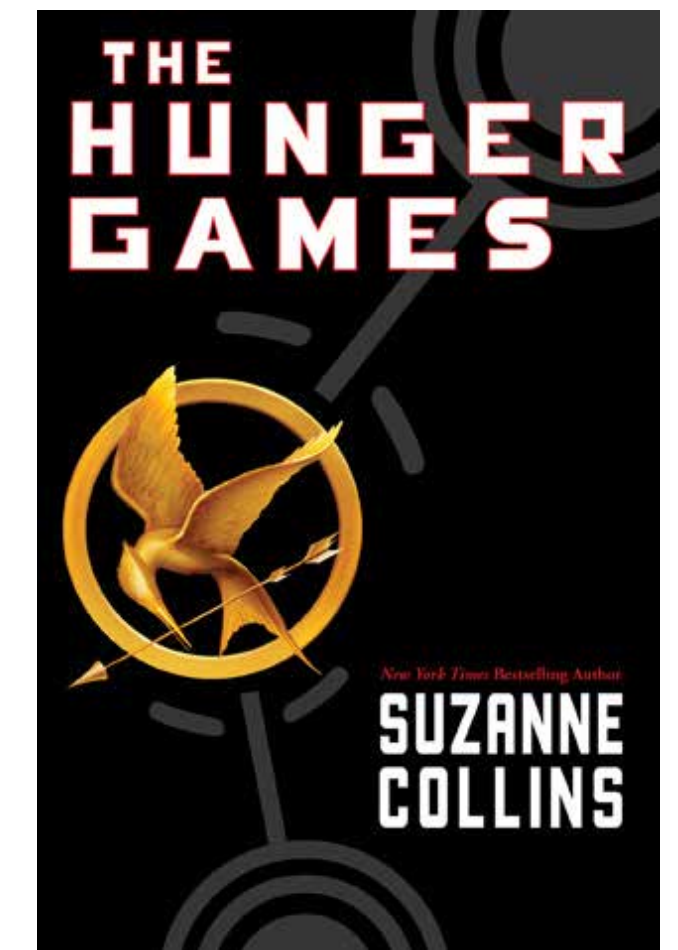


# Text Complexity

## FIRST PARAGRAPH *THE HUNGER GAMES*

1 When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold.  
2 My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth  
3 but finding only the rough canvas cover of the  
4 mattress. She must have had bad dreams and  
5 climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did.  
6 This is the day of the reaping.



Does text complexity include more than complicated vocabulary and longer sentences? Even though written for young adults, *The Hunger Games* challenges a young reader's analytical abilities with relatively simple language, like its first paragraph.

Beginning with a tactile image, "cold" (1), Katniss, the narrator, starts to set mood and general foreshadowing. She personifies her "fingers stretch[ing] out" (2), suggesting later conflicts between impulse and will, conflicts to be dramatically displayed in the Games themselves. Her second tactile image, "rough canvas" (3), not only continues to evoke the reader's senses negatively but reinforces the antithesis between loving warmth and cold emptiness. The physical reality Katniss creates is bad enough, but she now infers that Prim must have had "bad dreams" (4). Furthermore, it's situationally ironic that Prim would seek support from her mother. The reader eventually finds out that Katniss believes she is incapable of providing it. Katniss may understand this irony if her next words, "of course, she did" (5), are understood as sarcasm. She now juxtaposes the connotatively positive "reaping" (6) with all the negatives she has established, effectively holding readers in suspense. Finally, Katniss's first person limited perspective (1) creates situations where a reader must decide if her perceptions are reliably true or not, and this first paragraph can be one of these situations.

It's reasonable to assume that authors take special care in writing their first paragraphs. This is so because these paragraphs are in a position to begin setting up a novel's major narrative elements, character and theme chief among them. This kind of care requires complexity, and in the first paragraph of her novel Suzanne Collins provides an example.

