

WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

Battle Royale: a book review

You might have heard of Netflix phenomenon *Squid Game* or the very popular *Hunger Games* saga, but did you know that they are both thought to be based on the same Japanese book?



I'd been meaning to read *Battle Royale* since I first caught a scene of the film adaptation on TV and thought to myself "what the hell did I just watch?!". I didn't **get round to** it until December of last year. So, was it worth the wait?

Battle Royale, which also became a manga series and was **swiftly** made into a successful film, is a dystopian horror novel by Koushun Takami, published in 1999 and set in a fictional, fascist Japan known as the 'Republic of Greater East Asia', following an alternative World War 2 where Japan emerged victorious.

In this scenario, the government controls absolutely everything, and even rock music is **banned** on the grounds that it's "immoral". To add to this already horrific circumstance, the government holds an annual programme that **forces** a class of 42 secondary school students to play a 'game'. The teenagers are **kidnapped** and taken to an anonymous location where they are each given a weapon and exactly 3 days to kill each other.

Yes, that's right. The aim of the game is to survive, and in order to do so, you must put an end to your classmates, some of whom are your most cherished friends. To make things even more

interesting, your assigned weapon could be anything from a machine gun to a fork.

The book explains vaguely that this game forms part of a strategy to stop the masses from organising a revolt against the dictator, using media coverage of the game to **instil** a sense of mutual fear among members of the population. In addition, a handful of rich people have fun betting money on who will survive.

As a reader, what I most like about this book is the cruel nature of the concept itself. I appreciate the poetic juxtaposition of teenage innocence with death and gore, the **bittersweet** scenes of humour and romance, quite literally cut short by the **merciless** blade of a **deranged** classmate.

However, I felt there were many missed opportunities where the writer could have made the characters more relatable or added some depth and metaphor to all the blood-filled action. On the whole, it was a very simple, **linear** account of events, with physical descriptions of the many fights and deaths, and I found participants' narrated thoughts to be frustratingly uncomplex.

On the other hand, as someone who enjoys being **moved**, I was pleased to experience some psychological discomfort while reading this, and I confess that the ending brought a tear to my eye when I least expected it.

I recommed *Battle Royale* to anyone who feels intrigued by the notion of teenagers killing each other, but be prepared to **mix up** all the Japanese names if you're not familiar! While I can't say much for the author's talent for writing, I still feel like this story deserves to be read, if only for its originality and shock factor, not to mention its sustained influence in popular culture today.



by ECP coach

Ali Keable

Word list

to get round to sth: to finally do sth you have been intending to do

swiftly: quickly, soon

banned: prohibited

to force: to oblige by force

to kidnap: to capture

to instil sth: to establish an attitude in sb's mind

bittersweet: combining both positive and negative emotions

merciless: having no mercy (ES: despiadado)

deranged: crazy, insane

linear: in sequential order

to move: to cause to feel strong emotions

to mix up: to confuse two or more things

Let's chat about that!

1. Have you read *Battle Royale*? If not, do you like the sound of this book? Why (not)?
2. What aspects of the book did Alison enjoy most/least?
3. Why do you think someone would be inspired to write a story about teenagers who are forced to murder each other?
4. What do *Battle Royale*, *The Hunger Games* and *Squid Game* have in common?
5. What kind of books do you enjoy reading? Why?
6. "The book is always better than the film". – Do you agree?

Vocabulary: weapons (Contains spoilers!)

Weapons are objects or items that people use to attack each other in warfare.

Here is a list of some of the weapons assigned to the students in *Battle Royale*:

Axe – *hacha*

Baseball bat –

Carving knife –

Crossbow –

Grenade –

Hammer –

Handgun –

Submachine gun –

Nunchuk –

Pen-knife –

Time bomb –

Shotgun –

Write the translation in Spanish, using a dictionary to help you.

If you were participating in *Battle Royale*, which weapon would you prefer to use and why?

Match each word with a picture:

1. Bow & arrow

2. Cannon

3. Sword

4. Shield

5. Bullet

6. Bullet-proof vest

