

# Southfield Public Library

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## *Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel*

*Discussion questions used at SPL April 12 & 13, 2016*

The following questions were taken from the Michigan Humanities Council Great Michigan Read Reader's Guide:

1. Why do you think Emily St. John Mandel chose a flu pandemic in *Station Eleven*? Did it seem believable?
2. What factors contributed to some characters surviving the Georgian Flu? Was it just random luck?
3. In what ways do the humanities and art represent our best human qualities?
4. What are some examples in *Station Eleven* of characters doing more than just surviving?
5. What items would you keep to remember the world?
6. What items would you add to the Museum of Civilization?
7. In *Station Eleven*, not everyone wanted to remember the old world. What are the advantages and disadvantages of not remembering?
8. What kind of community would you want to be a part of?
9. What elements do you feel define a community?
10. *Station Eleven* explores many different types of relationships through the novel. Which characters do you think had the most interesting relationships?
11. How do you think the knife tattoos helped Kirsten cope with the lives she had to take?
12. What ethical dilemmas do the characters in *Station Eleven* face?

The following questions are from Lit Lovers website's Reader's Guide:

1. Now that you've read the entire novel, go back and reread the passage by Czeslaw Milosz that serves as an epigraph. What does it mean? Why did Mandel choose it to introduce *Station Eleven*?
2. Does the novel have a main character? Who would you consider it to be?
3. Arthur Leander dies while performing King Lear, and the Traveling Symphony performs Shakespeare's works. On page 57, Mandel writes, "Shakespeare was the third born to his parents, but the first to survive infancy. Four of his siblings died young. His son, Hamnet, died at eleven and left behind a twin. Plague closed the theaters again and again, death flickering over the landscape." How do Shakespearean motifs

coincide with those of *Station Eleven*, both the novel and the comic?

4. Arthur's death happens to coincide with the arrival of the Georgia Flu. If Jeevan had been able to save him, it wouldn't have prevented the apocalypse. But how might the trajectory of the novel been different?

5. What is the metaphor of the Station Eleven comic books? How does the Undersea connect to the events of the novel?

6. "Survival is insufficient," a line from *Star Trek: Voyager*, is the Traveling Symphony's motto. What does it mean to them?

7. On page 62, the prophet discusses death: "I'm not speaking of the tedious variations on physical death. There's the death of the body, and there's the death of the soul. I saw my mother die twice." Knowing who his mother was, what do you think he meant by that?

8. Certain items turn up again and again, for instance the comic books and the paperweight—things Arthur gave away before he died, because he didn't want any more possessions. And Clark's Museum of Civilization turns what we think of as mundane belongings into totems worthy of study. What point is Mandel making?

9. On a related note, some characters—like Clark—believe in preserving and teaching about the time before the flu. But in Kirsten's interview with François Diallo, we learn that there are entire towns that prefer not to: "We went to a place once where the children didn't know the world had ever been different...." (page 115). What are the benefits of remembering, and of not remembering?

10. What do you think happened during the year Kirsten can't remember?

11. In a letter to his childhood friend, Arthur writes that he's been thinking about a quote from Yeats, "Love is like the lion's tooth." (page 158). What does this mean, and why is he thinking about it?

12. How does the impending publication of those letters affect Arthur?

13. On page 206, Arthur remembers Miranda saying "I regret nothing," and uses that to deepen his understanding of Lear, "a man who regrets everything," as well as his own life. How do his regrets fit into the larger scope of the novel? Other than Miranda, are there other characters that refuse to regret?

14. Throughout the novel, those who were alive during the time before the flu remember specific things about those days: the ease of electricity, the taste of an orange. In their place, what do you think you'd remember most?

15. What do you imagine the Traveling Symphony will find when they reach the brightly lit town to the south?

16. The novel ends with Clark, remembering the dinn 1. Now that you've read the entire novel, go back and reread the passage by Czeslaw Milosz that serves as an epigraph. What does it mean? Why did Mandel choose it to introduce *Station Eleven*?

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## *General discussion questions*

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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*Discussion questions taken from a website: Michigan Humanities Council Great Michigan Read*

*website address: <http://www.michiganhumanities.org/great-michigan-read/gmr-2015-16-title/>*

Reader's Guide:

<http://www.michiganhumanities.org/documents/gmr/GMR-Readers-2015-16.pdf>

2016 Author Tour Dates:

<http://www.michiganhumanities.org/great-michigan-read/author-tour/>