

***Station Eleven* Lesson Plan 4**  
Coping with Catastrophe in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction  
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**Overview:**

This lesson encourages students to explore the ways *Station Eleven* imagines how different groups might respond to a post-apocalyptic world. This lesson is designed to follow the lesson titled ““Because Survival is Insufficient”: Art at the End of the World” and encompasses readings from the entire novel. For this reason, this lesson is best suited for the end of the unit.

**Objectives:**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the role of “art, memory, and cultural expression” in *Station Eleven* and articulate an explanation of the novel’s focus on expression rather than survival
- Identify the ethos of different societies within *Station Eleven*’s postapocalyptic narrative and explain the advantages and disadvantages of each society’s response to the post-flu world

**Class Structure:**

*15 minutes:* Framing Activity

- Begin the lesson by recapping the previous conversation.
- Introduce students to Maximilian Felder’s argument for how the novel differs from other postapocalyptic narratives. Felder argues, “Emily St. John Mendel’s *Station Eleven* (2014), although for all intents and purposes a successful and convincing postapocalyptic narrative, is nevertheless markedly different from most other representatives of the genre, It does not focus on survival, struggle, and conflict but rather examines the possibility and necessity of cultural expression in a postapocalyptic setting, demonstrating the important and value of art and memory even in strained circumstances” (166).
- Ask students to briefly assess the validity of Felder’s claim. Are art, memory, and cultural expression necessarily central in *Station Eleven*’s postapocalyptic world? After students have responded, tell them that the rest of the lesson will revolve around this question.

*30 minutes:* Group Activity

- Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Assign each group one of the post-pandemic societies explored in *Station Eleven*: the traveling symphony, the Severn City Airport, the McKinley homesteading community, and the “Prophet’s” cult in St. Deborah by the Water
- Ask each group to assume the role of anthropologists and try to better understand how the society they were assigned functioned as a response to the post-pandemic world. Have students answer the following questions:
  - What are the ethics of this society? How does this society operate? Who is the leader? How are decisions made? Who or what do they choose to protect or attack?
  - How does this society interact with outsiders? With members who choose to leave the society?

- How does this society find comfort in a post-apocalyptic world? Do they turn to art, religion, family, history, etc.? What are the benefits and ramifications of that decision?
- How does this society interpret the Georgia Flu itself—e.g. as an anomaly, an act of god, etc.? How does that interpretation influence the society’s structure and behavior?
- Note: If students need help finding information, you can point them toward the following chapters:
  - The traveling symphony: Chapters 7-10, 19, 23, and 49
  - Severn City Airport: Chapters 42-44, 51-52
  - McKinley: Chapter 46
  - The Prophet’s Cult in St. Deborah by the Water: Chapters 12, 19, and 50.

*30 minutes:* Class Discussion

- Bring the class back together and ask each group to give a 1-2 minute anthropological report on their assigned society.
- Once each group has shared their findings, ask students to discuss postapocalyptic responses in the novel as a whole:
  - Which responses seemed to work the best for survival? For mental health? For community?
  - Which factors seem to lead to stability? Which factors seem to lead to a more meaningful life?
- Bring the class’s focus back to the *Station Eleven* graphic novels. Ask students how the books function in the novel.
  - What do these books mean to Miranda? To Kirsten? To Tyler?
  - How do the *Station Eleven* graphic novels connect different characters across decades and contexts? Does it reach them all in the same way?
  - The novel ends with the inhabitants of the Severn City Airport seeing electrical lighting in the distance and with Clark imagining that people far away will soon begin to travel by sailboat again. What does this ending lead us to believe about how societies will progress after the events of *Station Eleven*?

**Sources:**

Feldner, M. (2018). “Survival is insufficient”: The Postapocalyptic Imagination of Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*. *Anglica*, 27(1), 165–179.  
<https://doi.org/10.7311/0860-5734.27.1.12>

Mandel, Emily St. John. *Station Eleven*. Picador, 2015.