

# In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Jacque Stouffer



## *Station Eleven*

by Emily St. John Mandel

Twenty years after a devastating flu pandemic, Kirsten Raymonde moves between the settlements of the altered world with a small troupe of actors and musicians. They call themselves The Traveling Symphony, and they have dedicated themselves to keeping the remnants of art and humanity alive. But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who will threaten the tiny band's existence.

1. How does the Czeslaw Milosz quote at the book's beginning summarize *Station Eleven* for you?
2. Placing yourself in a post-pandemic situation, which of *Station Eleven's* characters most closely resemble the path you think you would follow?
3. Some might say there's irony in Jeevan realizing he does, in fact, want to become an EMT on the exact night that the Georgia Flu pandemic reaches North America. Do you agree that it's ironic? What do you think causes Jeevan's revelation? A dying actor on stage? The fact that the actor is one whom Jeevan photographed as a paparazzo or later interviewed? In what way(s) is this revelation the impetus for the book?
4. Chapter 6 is "An Incomplete List". How did reading this affect your awareness and thankfulness for what we have today? What would you miss the most, in the same situation? What does your list of things to be missed reveal about yourself or our way of life?
5. Why do you think the author chose to center the book in the Upper Midwest and Canada? How does the physical setting clarify the story for you ... particularly the post-pandemic sections?
6. What does the identification of musicians by their instruments and chair numbers do to the story-telling? How would this book read differently if they all had proper names and were referred to in that way?
7. When August and Kirsten break into abandoned homes, August looks for TV guides and Kirsten looks for celebrity gossip magazines.

Why do you think these are their priorities when they're lacking basic necessities?

8. In Chapter 8, a two-page spread in the first issue of the *Station Eleven* comic book is described with this line of text at the bottom:

*"I stood looking over my damaged home and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth."*

As Christians, how do we reconcile the 'sweetness of life' with the promise of Heaven? Is life on Earth sweet because of our homes and materials items; because of our relationships; because of God?

9. Talk about any symbolism or meaning you gather from the post-pandemic survival of fast food restaurants, big box stores, and gas stations. Why do you think the survivors congregated in those types of locations, rather than individual homes or newly-created spaces?
10. In Chapter 10, the author compares the issues and frustrations that exist in the Traveling Symphony with the "same problems suffered by every group of people everywhere since before the collapse". She goes on to say,

*“But what made it bearable were the friendships, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare, the moments of transcendent beauty and joy ...”*

Do these things make life bearable for us? What would you add to the list and why?

*“When the group disappeared around the curve of the airport road, he was certain he wasn’t alone in his relief.*

*‘That kind of insanity’s contagious,’ Dolores had said, echoing his thought.”*

What else in *Station Eleven* is contagious? Are these same things contagious in our world?

15. In Chapter 53, as Arthur attempts to describe *Station Eleven*’s storyline to Tanya, he says:

*“The Undersea, especially. All those people in limbo, waiting around, plotting, for what?”*

How does Arthur’s statement parallel what eventually happens post-pandemic? How is it an accurate or inaccurate description of our own lives? How would you answer Arthur’s question?

16. So many of the characters intersect with each other throughout the book. Does this seem natural, logical, contrived? How do the intersections support or detract from the book’s progress?

17. Why does Clark start the Museum of Civilization ... and why does he to

continue to add to it over the years? What is it about collecting pieces of our history that comforts and sustains us?

18. Chapter 51 – Kirsten remembers her first night with the Symphony, and talking to Dieter about Shakespeare. Dieter refers to Shakespeare’s life as “plague-haunted.”

*“Wait, do you mean he had the plague?” she asked.*

*“No,” Dieter said, “I mean he was defined by it ... Do you know what that means, to be defined by something?”*

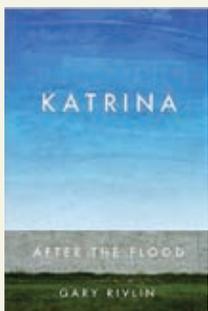
What circumstances or points in history have defined you? What is our choice in letting situations define us?

19. In each of the abandoned homes Kirsten has explored on her journeys, she hopes for electricity. Why is that, do you think? When Clark finally shows her “pinpricks of light arranged into a grid,” what do you think is going through her mind? What do those pinpricks of light represent for Kirsten and all of the survivors?

20. Why do you think the book is titled *Station Eleven*?

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## NEXT MONTH



### ***Katrina: After the Flood***

by Gary Rivlin

Ten years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southeast Louisiana—on August 29, 2005—journalist Gary Rivlin traces the storm’s immediate damage, the city of New Orleans’s efforts to rebuild itself, and the storm’s lasting effects not just on the city’s geography and infrastructure—but on the psychic, racial, and social fabric of one of this nation’s great cities.