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VCE English $\frac{3}{4}$
Station Samples
Samples

Section A: Samples

“Always these memories, barely submerged.” ‘Station Eleven demonstrates that nothing is ever completely lost.’ Discuss.

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10/10 Exemplar:

What does it mean to be lost, and what does it mean to remain? At the heart of Emily St John Mandel’s post-apocalyptic dystopia ‘Station Eleven’ is a fascination with what humanity chooses to salvage or remember: the things that endure, why they endure, and whether time transmutes them into something different from what they once were. We are little more than an amalgamation of our important memories, and what we choose to ‘lose’ or ‘keep’ — or whether we truly ever retain such a choice — is a key concern affecting all in the pre and post-pandemic worlds. Further, while it is undeniable that some things (or people) cannot remain forever, Mandel suggests that they live on through their legacy. Perhaps of utmost interest to Mandel, however, is whether civilisation itself can recover from the brink of being lost, and what remnants of society remain in the time in between.

As time goes on, people often forget the extraneous details of their lives — but they try their best to hold on to who they are. Mandel explores this by noting firstly what is easily let go. For Kirsten, such things include her ‘street address’, the ‘TV shows’ from her childhood, and even ‘her mother’s face’. Twenty years after the pandemic, these details have morphed into little more than vague and fuzzy ideas: she certainly remembers that she watched TV, and that her mother had a face, but such lines are drawn with thin, grey pencil. These memories must be shed so that one can adapt to the new world: Kirsten’s street address is far less useful than ‘the reassuring weight of knives on her belt’. The question is whether it can be said that the ‘real’ Kirsten has been lost, and indeed Mandel questions whether there is actually a ‘true self’ to hold onto. Her characters all face an underlying existential crisis: should they accept that their environment and their experiences have damaged them, leaving them ‘not unaltered’, or is there a purer version of themselves still lying beneath, ‘barely submerged’? Through Arthur Leander, Mandel hints at an answer — but the answer is not what one might expect. When Arthur is a child, he hears that a ‘woman walked into a lake’ and is never found, and this ‘leaves a frisson of darkness’ in him that permanently remains. This ‘darkness’ suggests that Arthur has lived most of his life ‘altered’ — even if just subconsciously — by the traumatic experience from his past. Mandel’s assertion might thus be that we are not pure for very long in life; that one will invariably lose their innocence through experience, and that this is simply how things are. More interesting, however, are the ways in which humans try to reclaim or protect this innocence. Throughout the novel, Kirsten alludes to her brother Peter being ‘plagued by nightmares’ of ‘the road’ — how he ‘hope[s] she never remember[s] it’ — and in a conversation with Diallo, she explains how she has ‘problems with memory’. It is clear that Peter is conscious that his sister might become lost to the darkness of the new world, and there is evidence in Kirsten’s amnesia that she harbours the same concerns for herself. Mandel’s point here is that one must sometimes sacrifice part of oneself to keep the remainder intact: that some of the details of our lives must be jettisoned to oblivion so that we do not find ourselves completely lost.

Mandel also explores the ability of people, and things, to endure beyond their time, even when it seems like they might be lost forever. There is no question that loss of life is permanent in a physical sense, and the impact of such loss often lies ‘barely submerged’. The novel’s non-linear nature is a representation of this idea: just like how Mandel has devised *Station Eleven*’s structure into a series of vignettes that feel like constant revisitations, for some characters it seems to be ‘always these memories’ of certain people they have lost. Jeevan is haunted by images of ‘Arthur’s blank stare’, and Clark describes Arthur’s death as a ‘shock’ that seems impossible. Indeed it is Clark, and his relationship with Arthur, that are most pertinent to this discussion. It can be said that his and Arthur’s friendship is in a perpetual state of being ‘lost’: that as time goes by, and they drift away from each other, their memories are no longer a reflection of the people they currently are. Clark understands this, and perhaps this is why Mandel so often utilises past tense when Clark is discussing him: ‘You should’ve seen [Arthur] ... before the fame, all those warping things’. It might seem heart-rending that Clark talks about Arthur (when alive) as if he is a different person who is now gone, but it can be argued that Mandel’s perspective is more optimistic. She is proposing, through Clark’s constant reflections about his friend, that the old Arthur lives on in his memory. The same can be said about what Clark, and others, choose to preserve. Clark and his fellow airport residents preserve ‘impractical’ objects that are ‘beautiful and strange’, and Diallo wishes to ‘create an oral history’ of the post-pandemic world. Clark and Diallo’s purposes are intertwined in the sense that they wish to document the past, to ensure that the texture and identity of humanity is preserved as much as it can be. More poignant are the objects that seem to live on accidentally: the ‘clouded glass’ paperweight is ‘of no practical use whatsoever’, but it is special for what it represents. It is a ‘gift that Clark brought’ and it brings joy to a ‘teary-eyed’ Kirsten; Miranda quips that the paperweight is ‘like looking into a storm’. This object represents how people will always be connected in some way, how there are unseen common threads that link all of humanity, and how they will continue to do so until the end of our time.

Although it feels like humanity’s hope should have completely faded, people in the post-pandemic world still believe that civilisation is not lost. Numerous characters not only remember the technology of the old world, but are eager to resurrect it — even if in primitive form. Diallo builds an ‘improvised printing press’ because he ‘believe[s] in understanding history’; an ‘inventor’ in Traverse City ‘rig[s] an electrical system in an attic’. It is important to note the common motivation for such endeavours. People are often drawn to idealistic ambitions: to produce or find something greater than themselves. For Diallo, he wishes to document the stories of present-day society. The inventor is chasing the ‘[grand] aspiration’ of finding the internet. Mandel thus suggests that civilisation will never be lost because people will find great fulfilment in chasing pursuits that will lead to its reconstruction. There are also lexical and structural choices on Mandel’s behalf that hint at her belief that civilisation is irrepressible. Firstly, the use of the word ‘interrupted’: Mandel, through August, references a ‘[parallel] universe in which civilisation hadn’t been so brutally interrupted’. The implication of the word ‘interrupted’ — which suggests an impermanent intermission — is that humanity has merely reached a roadblock, and will rebuild civilisation once again. A more telling example is in her use of numerous, quick shifts in perspective in Chapter 52, which makes it feel as though the new world is living and breathing, alive and full of promise. She describes ‘Kirsten [staring] through the telescope’ at a light-filled town, followed by ‘Charlie and August [sitting] by Sayid’s bed’ somewhere else, then ‘Jeevan ... baking bread’ and finally the ‘caravans of the ... Symphony ... arriving at the .. Airport’. It is apparent in this chapter that the fabric of society is slowly knitting itself back together, and that there are multiple factors that form the bedrock of civilisation: Kirsten’s curiosity and hope, Charlie and August’s togetherness, Jeevan’s inner peace and responsibility to his family, and the Symphony’s purpose and dedication. Most emphasised by Mandel is curiosity and inspiration. Although the imagination of people in the new world is captured by mere symbols of progress, rather than anything substantive — ‘an airplane ris[ing] again’ / ‘pinpricks of light arranged into a grid’ — the point is not the actual progress itself. That will come later. Mandel’s contention is that humanity needs just a spark to begin again, just a morsel of belief and inspiration to restart the journey.

Nothing is ever completely lost, not memories or identities, not people, and not the world that seems gone. Mandel suggests that as long as people are there to remember, to cultivate, or even just be present, certain things will always remain. Jeevan, noticing his son's likeness to his brother Frank, notes that his memories of Frank are 'barely submerged': this is how it is with everything important, both in the new world and old. People cannot live forever, and relationships cannot last forever, but Mandel suggests their existence and their impact leave a legacy that lasts far beyond death or dissolution. What is important is that we choose to keep things, and that we believe they can be kept: in the post-pandemic world, this is distilled into the grander, idealised goal of rebuilding civilisation, but perhaps more poignantly, into the goal of retaining and strengthening our ties with one another — with the Franks in our lives, past and present.

Brief plan

- People have forgotten some things, but they remember many things
- Some things or people are lost forever, and the impact of their loss is explored. But they can endure through their legacy
- People do not believe that civilization is lost forever. They believe humanity can recover in some shape or form

Space for Personal Notes



Section B: Detailed Plan



Para 1 - People have forgotten some things, but they remember many things

- (MEM1) Some things have seemingly fallen out of the memory of civilization
 - 🇨🇩 "None of the older Symphony members knew much about science, which was frankly maddening given how much time these people had had to look things up on the Internet before the world ended."
 - 🇨🇩 But in a sense, they haven't
 - "Here's the thing, kids, the entire world is a place where artifacts from the old world are preserved."
- (MEM2) Memory fades
 - 🇨🇩 "There were countless things about the pre-collapse world that Kirsten couldn't remember—her street address, her mother's face, the TV shows that August never stopped talking about—"
 - 🇨🇩 "cocaine and smooth girls with perfect skin in houses and hotel rooms, a number of years that come back to him later in strobelike flashes" (Arthur)
 - 🇨🇩 Sometimes memories are repressed
 - "I think I've mentioned before, I have some problems with memory. I can't remember very much from before the collapse."
 - "The road," he'd always said, when she shook him awake and asked what he'd been dreaming of. He'd said, "I hope you never remember it."
 - "DIALLO: It's not uncommon among people who were children when it happened."
 - 🇨🇩 But some memories have such a profound impact that they never go away
 - "Still, the fact is that a woman walked into a lake that wasn't large and no one found the body for two weeks despite intensive searching, and the episode sparks up against Arthur's childhood memories retrospectively and leaves a frisson of darkness that wasn't there at the time." (Arthur)



Para 2 - Some things or people are lost forever, and the impact of their loss is explored. But they can endure through their legacy

➤ (L1) Loss has a profound impact

🇬🇧 It is shocking

- "Miranda," he said, "I'm afraid I'm calling with some rather bad news. Perhaps you should sit down."
- "It's hard to take in." He cleared his throat again. "It's a shock, it's ... I've known him since I was eighteen. It seems impossible to me too."
- Even though Jeevan did not know Arthur, he is still haunted by his death

🇬🇧 "He shook his head to dispel the image of Arthur's blank stare"

🇬🇧 Kirsten's loss of innocence is a pivotal moment in her life

- "He's going to die, isn't he?" She was breathing in little sobs." (Kirsten)

🇬🇧 Loss is numbing

- "So this is how it ends, she thought, when the call was over, and she was soothed by the banality of it. You get a phone call in a foreign country, and just like that the man with whom you once thought you'd grow old has departed from this earth."
- Even if it is forewarned

🇬🇧 "I can't just leave you."
"I'll leave first," Frank said. "I've given this some thought."
"What do you mean?" he asked, but he knew what Frank meant."

➤ (L2) Loss of the former world

🇬🇧 Loss of the names of people in it

- "DIALLO: The mystery audience member who knew CPR. He's in the New York Times obituary.
- RAYMONDE: He was kind to me. Do you know his name?
- DIALLO: I'm not sure anyone does."

🇬🇧 Discuss Frank

➤ (AB2) Art itself is useful and important

📌 It endures

- "And now in a twilight once more lit by candles, the age of electricity having come and gone, Titania turns to face her fairy king."
- "when he had empty space in the newspaper he filled it with text from his collection. The first issue had an Emily Dickinson poem, the second an excerpt from a biography of Abraham Lincoln."

📌 Art can aid in remembering the past

- "People want what was best about the world," Dieter said.

➤ Other quotes:

- 📌 "You should've seen him," Clark said. "I should've seen ... I'm sorry, what?" "Back at the beginning, when he was just starting out. You've seen his talent, his talent was obvious, but if you'd seen him before any of the rest of it, all the tabloids and movies and divorces, the fame, all those warping things."
- 📌 "Her gaze falls on the gift that Clark brought this evening, a paperweight of clouded glass. When she holds it, it's a pleasing weight in the palm of her hand. It's like looking into a storm." (Miranda)

Para 3 - People do not believe civilisation is lost forever - that humanity can recover in some shape or form

➤ (H2) Some people still remain hopeful that civilisation can recover

📌 Mandel herself, shown through her word choice - 'interrupted' (i.e. civilisation will prevail in the end):

- " a universe in which civilization hadn't been so brutally interrupted."

📌 Mandel, through her numerous shifts in perspective in Chapter 52, makes it feel like the new world is alive

- "Kirsten stares through the telescope at the town with electric light."
- "In the terminal building, Charlie and August sit by Sayid's bed in the Baggage Claim infirmary and tell him about the concert, and he smiles for the first time in a number of days."

- "A thousand miles to the south of the airport, Jeevan is baking bread in an outdoor oven."
- "Far to the north, in a place so distant that in this flightless world it might as well be another planet, the caravans of the Traveling Symphony are arriving at the Severn City Airport."

📍 Even if it's from just a morsel of inspiration

- "The mention of Arthur aside, he realized, this was an extraordinary development. If there were newspapers now, what else might be possible?" (Clark)
- "It's the most extraordinary thing. I don't know how they did it on such a large scale." (Clark)
- "In the distance, pinpricks of light arranged into a grid. There, plainly visible on the side of a hill some miles distant: a town, or a village, whose streets were lit up with electricity."
- "He has no expectation of seeing an airplane rise again in his lifetime, but is it possible that somewhere there are ships setting out? If there are again towns with streetlights, if there are symphonies and newspapers, then what else might this awakening world contain?" (Clark)

📍 There are examples of humanity's inability to lie idle (i.e. they will naturally persevere)

- "It's the waiting," Clark had heard a woman say, "I can't take the waiting, I have to do something, even if it's just walking to the nearest town to see what's going on...."
- "Kirsten was looking at the improvised printing press, massive in the shadows at the back of the room." (Diallo)

📍 Humans channel their hope into the possibility that technology can re-emerge

- "In Traverse City, the town they'd recently left, an inventor had rigged an electrical system in an attic. It was modest in scope, a stationary bicycle that when pedaled vigorously could power a laptop, but the inventor had grander aspirations: the point wasn't actually the electrical system, the point was that he was looking for the Internet. A few of the younger Symphony members had felt a little thrill when he'd said this, remembered the stories they'd been told about WiFi and the impossible-to-imagine Cloud, wondered if the Internet might still be out there somehow, invisible pinpricks of light suspended in the air around them."

- Electrical light, especially, seems a symbol of hope

📍 "[Kirsten] was fascinated by electricity. She harbored visions of a lamp with a pink shade on a side table, a nightlight shaped like a puffy half-moon, a chandelier in a dining room, a brilliant stage."

📍 "She was beside herself with impatience to see the far southern town with the electrical grid." (Kirsten)