

ENGLISH – STATION 11 ESSAY

To what extent does *Station Eleven* suggest that a crisis brings out the best and worst in people?

Emily S.J Mandel's *Station Eleven* uses themes of survival, art and civilisation in order to show how crisis can bring the best and worst out of people to a seemingly high extent. This is displayed through multiple characters whose experiences in a post-apocalyptic era, lead them to do things they probably wouldn't otherwise do. This is present through the positive repercussions on Jeevan, however the negative repercussions on Tyler and Elizabeth. In addition, readers see how Kirsten is led to do both good and bad as a result of crisis. Crisis therefore refers to a number of occurrences in the novel, including how characters respond to death, traumatic memories, the end of a civilisation and the things that follow.

Mandel uses *Station Eleven* in order to show through characters like Jeevan and Miranda, how crisis can bring out the best in people, as it leads them to do good that they otherwise may not have. From the beginning of the novel, readers discover Jeevan's longing to be a paramedic, completely diverting from his previous journalism career. However, it wasn't until Arthur's heart attack on stage that he realised he really wanted to do so, and this passion led him to be able to use these skills to assist those in the post-apocalypse by taking up the role of the doctor. He therefore realises in a time of crisis, that he wants to do something he believes is valuable to society, his role as a paparazzo was "not enough anymore". We see a similar response by Miranda, who also turns to do good in times of crisis. However, Miranda's crises related more to her own inner, personal battles. She therefore turns to art in order to distract herself from her own stresses, living a life where she unapologetically regrets nothing. She ultimately creates the 'Dr Eleven' series of graphic novels which inadvertently becomes incredibly important to characters in the post-collapse. Therefore, yet another example of how crisis can truly bring out the best in people, as Mandel shows through Miranda and Jeevan.

Unfortunately, it is also true that crisis brings out the worst in people, as readers see Tyler and Elizabeth turn into extremists as they turn to their faith in a vile and destructive way. Elizabeth instils a continuous belief that everything happened "because it was supposed to happen, however she begins to think that the collapse was a metaphor for a bigger 'cleansing' of the population which Tyler shares as he grows up with this enabling attitude, eventually leading to Tyler, her son, claiming the role of a "Prophet" in the new world. Characters like Elizabeth and Tyler are therefore used by Mandel to show readers how crisis can lead people to find meaning within the given circumstances, which can lead to further damage to a fragile civilisation. After both Elizabeth and her "pure" son join the cult, Tyler's transition into calling himself the "Prophet" leads to him being the head of a group of highly trained religious fanatics who, with the use of weapons, take over towns. In this way, we see horrible things occur, including when Tyler taking multiple wives, even young girls. Mandel shows also the role that memory plays in times of crisis and the effects that this has on the individual. The trauma that occurred for Tyler prior to the collapse was influential in who Tyler became post-collapse as his polygamy shows close resemblance to his father Arthur who leaves Tyler and his mother, taking up multiple wives in his lifetime. This likeness indicates to readers that trauma can affect people in multiple ways, and therefore memory can prove to lead people to do bad things in times of crisis, evident in these two characters.

Not only does crisis lead to bringing out the best and worst of people exclusively, but also concurrently which Mandel beautifully portrays through Kirsten, whose response to crisis is both good and bad. Kirsten is a realist who knows the cruelty that occurs due to the end of a civilisation, which means she must protect herself and others, but this also means she must sacrifice her morals and ultimately kill people in the fight to survive, and in her case, do more

than just survive. She spends time doing good, risking her life looking for her friend Charlie, protecting Sayid by taking another life and also lying to the Prophet in order to protect her friends. These are noble acts that Kirsten without hesitation does, in order to use the crisis to do good within her community, the Travelling Symphony. Obviously, the crisis also brings out the worst in Kirsten, as she kills multiple times in order to survive, and protect those she cares about in the post-collapse world, however she is also very aware that without the collapse of civilisation, the biggest crisis of all, these extreme acts of survival wouldn't have occurred. Mandel eventuates through Kirsten Raymonde, that catastrophic moments bring both the good and bad out of people, in order to cope and survive.

Finally, Station Eleven's main characters are able to portray how different personalities react differently to crossroads in the midst of disastrous times. In this case, Mandel's individuals had to survive the end of a modern civilisation and the beginning of a new, somewhat anarchical one. Miranda and Jeevan support the idea that crisis allows people to do good in order to help others and improve their own quality of life. In contrast, readers are accustomed to the negative effects of crisis on individuals like Tyler and Elizabeth who justify their horrible actions against others. Kirsten is someone who portrays how critical moments bring out both the best and worst in people as humans fight between their morals and their survival instincts.