

Life of the Mind

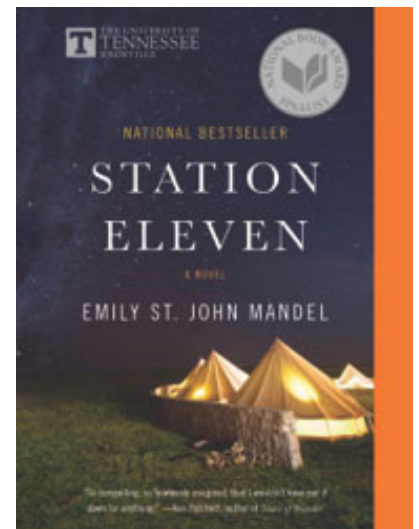
Reader's Guide

Class of 2021

The *Life of the Mind* common reading program is designed to open your mind to new ways of thinking. In this year's selection, *Station Eleven* reflects on the importance and fulfillment of finding purpose and meaning in the work we do to achieve true happiness in our lives. This selection, opens the door for dialogue about many of the challenges you will face in college as you enter adulthood and plan your futures.

Kirsten Raymonde will never forget the night Arthur Leander, the famous Hollywood actor, had a heart attack on stage during a production of *King Lear*. That was the night when a devastating flu pandemic arrived in the city, and within weeks, civilization as we know it came to an end.

Twenty years later, Kirsten 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. And as the story takes off, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, the strange twist of fate that connects them all will be revealed.



Class of 2021,

This Reader's Guide serves two purposes as a supplement to your reading. It outlines the Written or Creative Expression, your first assignment at the University of Tennessee. The rest of the guide also contains strategies and tips on how you can more deeply engage not only with the *Life of the Mind* book but also with the other different texts you'll come across in your classes this fall.

The Written or Creative Expression instructions begin on the next page (with formatting and submission guidelines in the back), and the strategies and tips that follow are divided into before, during, and after reading sections. These strategies and tips are based on what is expected as a student here at the University of Tennessee, and you can apply them to any of the readings from your coursework to prepare yourself for learning and classroom discussion.

Visit our FYS 100 course site on Canvas for more information, and if you have any questions along the way, feel free to contact me or any other member of the First-Year Studies team. We look forward to seeing you in August!

Happy reading,



Stella Bridgeman-Prince
Assistant Director
Course Instructor, FYS 100

Your Written or Creative Expression

In *Station Eleven* Emily St. John Mandel reflects on the importance and fulfillment of finding purpose and meaning in the work we do to achieve true happiness in our lives. This selection, opens the door for dialogue about many of the challenges you will face in college as you enter adulthood and plan for your future. This year's Life of the Mind response invites you to think about and reflect on the Traveling Symphony's motto "survival is insufficient".

Use this assignment as an opportunity to explore your thoughts about how surviving and thriving is beneficial to your collegiate career and why it is helpful to learn about what it means to survive and thrive in college. You could also describe in more detail an issue or theme raised by the book that you'd like to discuss on the discussion board.

Preparing this response will get you ready for discussions during the fall term and author visit. You are free to express your response in any way – write, draw, paint, or create a video, PowerPoint, or Prezi... the possibilities are limited only by your imagination!

Please note that no matter the format, all responses must include a written explanation. Length, formatting guidelines, and instructions on how to submit your response via Canvas are located at the end of this Guide. If you have any questions about this assignment, contact any member of the First-Year Studies Team at fys100@utk.edu.

Reading at a Glance

At first thought, it might be easy to assume that our minds work like computers when we read, with the words going in as input and the brain processing and storing the information. Research, however, demonstrates that the act of reading is actually highly interactive, more like a negotiation between the words you read and the knowledge you already have.

According to a recent article on reading comprehension, reading is "a complicated, actively thinking mental activity, a thinking process to experience, predict, verify and acknowledge information according to readers' previous information, knowledge and

experience, and also an interactive language communication between the readers and the writer through text.”¹

Therefore, how you come to make meaning from what you read (and everything else, for that matter) depends largely on your prior knowledge and experience. This is why discussions are so highly valued in academic communities; since people’s understandings differ, when we discuss what we read with one another, we have the opportunity to test ideas, explore new perspectives, and enrich our own knowledge.

Your coursework at the University of Tennessee will use reading to expose you to many different ideas, and to get the most out of your experience, it’s important to truly engage your mind when you read a text.

Before you Read

Preview and Plan

To help activate the background knowledge you bring to the table, familiarize yourself with the text before you begin reading. When you reflect on what you know and anticipate what you might discover, you will be able to more deeply engage with any text you come across:

- *Preview the text.* Check out the cover artwork and flip through the book to get an idea of how the text is organized.
- *Preview the author.* Consider what you know of author Emily St. John Mandel. What do the artwork and other visual features suggest about the author and/or text itself?
- What image, thought, or experience(s) does the title, *Station Eleven*, evoke for you? Note your initial impressions on paper.
- Reflect upon and list what you know about *Survival*. Where possible, also note the source of this knowledge.
- *Plan the experience.* Now take a moment to look at all the lists you’ve made. Based on these, what might you like to find more about as a result of reading this book? Note these things as well, and feel free to return and add further comments to these lists as you read.

¹ Yu-hui, L, Z Li-Rong, and N Yue. "Application of scheme theory to teaching college reading." *Canadian Social Science*. 6. (2010): 59-65. Print.

While you Read

Engage with the Text

While reading, your mind actively negotiates meaning by comparing what you read against what you (think you) already know. The deeper the engagement between these two elements, the more knowledge you create for yourself as a result. That said, mindful engagement with a text is crucial to succeeding at the University of Tennessee, no matter the class or the assignment. Here are some ways you can practice “mindful reading” with *Station Eleven*:

- Underline or highlight passages that resonate with you. Note ones you believe may bring up good points for discussion during Welcome Week.
- “Dialogue with the author” by making notes in the margins or on another sheet of paper. (I write in my books because I like to revisit my thoughts and reactions over time, but people’s preferences vary on this.) *As part of your dialogue, indicate points where the author is unclear, write down questions for discussion that come to you, identify key conflicts in the text, and note places where you agree or disagree with the author.*
- Make notes on your reactions to the text. For instance, what do you visualize when reading certain passages? What words do you particularly react to? What memories or instances come to mind when you read? These types of observations are good for sparking conversation in a group discussion.

Tip! Engage the first time to save time. When you take time to highlight and make notes as you read, you are often left with ready-made discussion points that you can bring straight into a classroom discussion. Way to prepare!

After you Read

Synthesize and Respond

After reading the book, quickly flip through and review parts you’ve highlighted, marked, and/or written comments and questions about:

- Look back at the list you made before you started reading the book. What did you learn that might make you reconsider what you know (or thought you knew)? Did you find answers to any of the things you wanted to know more about? These observations also make for great commentary in a group discussion.
- Pretend you are describing the book to someone who has not yet read it. Are you able to summarize the main points in just a few sentences? If so, this is a good

indication you have synthesized the reading. You could even include this brief synopsis as an introduction to your Creative Response!

- What issues/ideas brought up by the book would you like to discuss or debate further with peers?
- What questions do you have for Emily St. John Mandel as a result of your experience reading his book? Make note of these and feel free to submit them via the “Life of the Mind” tab on our Canvas site. We are looking for students with good questions for Emily to answer!

Written or Creative Expression Guidelines

1. One of the purposes of the Written or Creative Expression is to familiarize you with how the ideas and words of others are cited in academic work. Pay special attention to the plagiarism information and resources in the Academic Responsibility section of your modules on the FYS 100 Canvas course site.
2. All expressions (both ‘Written-only’ and ‘Creative with written explanation’) must be in PDF format and submitted through the FYS 100 Canvas course site.
3. Written-only Expressions (essays, poems, etc.) should be 300+ words and no more than 2 pages in length (1" margins, double-spaced, 12-point Times font).
4. Creative Expressions must be no more than 3 minutes or 2 pages in length (where applicable) and should be accompanied with a written explanation of 150+ words. To submit your Response as a .doc or .docx file, embed a photo or YouTube link of your project above your written explanation.
5. If you create a piece of art, like a painting or sculpture, we encourage you to drop it off at the First-Year Studies department after your arrival on campus. Selected works will go “on tour” throughout campus during the fall. The First-Year Studies office is open 8 AM – 5 PM, Monday through Friday, and is located at Greve Hall Room 217 821 Volunteer Blvd.

Written or Creative Expression Assignment

In this year’s selection, *Station Eleven* reflects on the importance and fulfillment of finding purpose and meaning in the work we do to achieve true happiness in our lives. This selection, opens the door for dialogue about many of the challenges you will face in college as you enter adulthood and plan your futures.

For your response, reflect on the Traveling Symphony’s motto “survival is insufficient”. This will require you to think critically about your response, which can be completed in one of the forms below.

This assignment has two options: Written Expression or Creative Expression

1. Based on what you read, **write** a two-page essay (12pt times roman font) that explores your thoughts about the Traveling Symphony's motto "survival is insufficient". What does it mean to them? How does the statement align with your own life and college perspective?

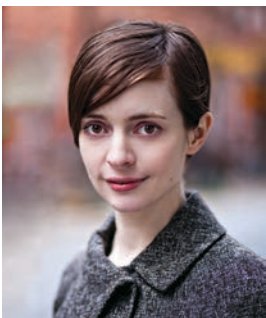
OR

2. Based on what you read, **create** an explanation in any format you choose (art, music, video etc.) that describes your interpretation and meaning of "survival is insufficient". Along with your creative piece of work you must have an analysis that describes what you created and it should be at least 150 words long (12pt times roman font). The creative response option is an open-ended response to the book.

When you have completed your assignment, you will upload it as a PDF document to the FYS 100 Canvas site, where it will be reviewed for a grade and for use during the Life of the Mind events this fall. If your creative response is not something that can be uploaded electronically, please take a picture of it or otherwise capture it in a PDF document to be uploaded, but please also plan to bring it to the FYS office so we can enjoy the "real thing." If yours is a performance piece, you can capture it via YouTube and include the URL in your PDF document; just make sure your video doesn't have privacy restrictions that will prevent us from viewing it! If you're not sure of the best way to get your work on to Canvas, just contact First-Year Studies, and we'll help you figure it out.

This assignment is due to Canvas by October 1st, at 12:00pm (noon) EST.

The best written or creative expressions submitted will have their work displayed and will be honored at a special event with the author during her visit on November 13-14th.



Don't just share your work with us! Use [#2017LOM](#) to share your piece with other UT students, faculty and staff, and to people all over the world, including the author Emily St. John Mandel! Use Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, or another social networking site to share your work with this hashtag, and your work could be selected for display on UT's campus and website!

Questions? Contact the First-Year Studies Team!

Online: fys.utk.edu Facebook: [utkfirstyearstudies](https://www.facebook.com/utkfirstyearstudies) Instagram: [utkfys](https://www.instagram.com/utkfys)

Office Hours: Monday-Friday from 8AM-5PM. (865) 974-3523

Located at Greve Hall Room 217, 821 Volunteer Blvd.