

# Past and its significance in station eleven novel

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## **Station Eleven: The Undying Past**

The past identifies people, whether it is good or bad, whether people want it to be forgotten or remembered, the past stays with people throughout their entire lives. *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel is about a post-pandemic world where 80% of the world's population had been wiped out. This book focuses on two main characters: Arthur Leander, a successful actor before the world's collapse, and Kirsten, an actress of the Traveling Symphony during the new age. Throughout the novel, the author switches back and forth between past and present events and point of views, showing just how deeply entangled the past and present are. The past never fades away entirely as there are always traces that remain in the present.

Artifacts are man-made objects that hold historical value. In *Station Eleven*, almost everything from the old world can be considered as an artifact as it reminds people of the past. The author's constant reference to the paperweight supports this idea. In chapter 12, when Kirsten muses over the contents in her backpack, she mentions that the paperweight "was of no practical use whatsoever, nothing but dead weight in the bag but she found it beautiful" (Mandel 24). Even the paperweight, a small and useless object, has a story of its own to tell. The story of how it started out as a present given to Arthur by his best friend, and then its journey through the hands of multiple people and finally ending up in Kirsten's possession. This paperweight also serves another purpose - like any artifact, it effectively establishes a connection between the past and the present.

Media, such as magazines and movies, also effectively preserves the past. When we watch movies, staring at “ the faces of long-dead actors on the screen”, we come to realize that these actors “ never truly die... They’re all immortal” (Mandel 66), This concept also applies to other forms of media, which can be either a good or bad thing. As Kirsten had said, “ Because of my collection, the [magazine] clippings, I understand something about permanent records” (Mandel 93). Media has a tendency to record everything, ranging from groundbreaking achievements to scandalous affairs, that last literally forever. Some of these records are not exactly what people want to be remembered for by future generations. Even though the owners of the paperweight and the celebrities gossiped about in magazines are long dead, the things they leave behind still exist for years afterward as evidence that history is never completely wiped away. They serve as some sort of confirmation that the people of the past had once breathed, walked, lived, and made an impact on this earth.

The past also lives on in the forms of people’s memories and of the stories they pass down to the younger generations. Although many events are not recorded down, they are still remembered through people’s own memories. “ Dieter had been twenty years old when the world ended. The main difference between Dieter and Kirsten was that Dieter remembered everything” (Mandel 47). And so people like Dieter would tell the younger children about the great wonders of the old world. Airplanes, air conditioners, running water... “ A few of the younger Symphony members... 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” (Mandel 14).

Perhaps someday, the secrets of the age of technology will be rediscovered. Even though the children of the new world have never actually seen functioning cars or laptops, these stories not only help keep the past alive, but also kindle sparks of hope in people.

The past is never entirely forgotten as it lives on in various ways such as artifacts, media, and memories. While some people believe that “ the past should be left in the past, otherwise it can destroy your future,” it is also important to be knowledgeable about the past and to be able to accept and learn from it. As William Faulkner had said in *Requiem for a Nun*, “ The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Although the past defines who people are today, it should not dictate their future actions. Humans are in control of their own destinies, and they should live their lives to the fullest despite past events. Rather than fearing it like a haunting nightmare, the past should be seen as a source of power and hope.