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## Freedom Of Expression Through Art In Station Eleven

One of the most timeless and universal concepts in our existence is art. Even cavemen, the most primitive of our species, used art to express themselves, even before a spoken language, and far earlier than a written one. Arts including singing, dancing, drawing, painting or even acting can be found throughout all of time, enjoyed by rich and poor alike; a truly universal concept. These arts hold a special and important place in our society, playing a great role in our lives. In the post-apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel, art is used as a means of bringing people together through hope and inspiration. Art carries this importance because it has the unique ability to convey thoughts and emotions across time, cultural differences, and all lifestyles. Regardless of when art is created or by whom it was created, all people can understand it, appreciate it, and see the perspectives of others. Throughout the book, art helps people come together, shows the perspectives of others, and allows anyone to freely express themselves, whether to convey a message or to vent their emotions.

A strong sense of togetherness is arguably necessary to human survival and happiness. One of the *Station Eleven*'s largest overarching themes is the importance of a sense of community and bringing people together, and art is in a large part responsible for that. Throughout the beginning sections of the novel, the author introduces characters of the Symphony, along with their backstories. Many of these characters backstories follow a similar structure, with the character traveling alone, enduring hardship, when they found the Symphony and became a part of it. For example, towards the beginning of the novel, the members of the Symphony are introduced, including a girl named Alexandra, who "...was fifteen, the Symphony's youngest actor. They'd found her on the road as a baby." (St. John Mandel 36). Another example comes at the beginning of chapter 45, when Francois is interviewing people, and he learns that "Viola had a harrowing story... burnt-out ruins ... grievously harmed ... walking alone for a hundred miles..." (St. John Mandel 266) about her life before joining the Symphony. Another example comes soon after with the story of "The third cello had buried his parents after both died... spent four years holed up... feared he'd lose his mind..." (St. John Mandel 266). All of these examples show the terror and danger of life alone, and conclude with a joyous life after the characters found one another and began to perform together. This in turn helps create the image that art brings people together, and is essential to our society.

When people are judged in today's society, it is often said that one should "Walk a mile in their shoes" first. The idea behind this saying is that everyone has a different perspective in life, and being able to view life from someone else's eyes can not only help change your view on life, but can help you understand the actions of others. This principle is used quite often in the novel, with art being the median through which one can view another's perspective. In the beginning of chapter 12, Kirsten is concluding a performance when she notices "A man in the front row had tears in his eyes" (St. John Mandel 59), and another man who "alone had sat on a chair... raised his hands over his head" (St. John Mandel 59). All these characters were brought together by experiencing Kirsten's art, and seeing her perspective and her past through her artwork, and in turn relinquishing their own past. This as well helps contribute to art's importance in our society.

Freedom of expression can be argued as one of the most important and necessary freedoms in our life. It is common knowledge that expressing one's own thoughts and feelings is therapeutic

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and healthy for the mind. Art is one of the many ways people can use to express themselves, and this theme is very evident in Station Eleven. In the opening paragraph of Chapter 12, Kirsten is finishing a performance and receiving a standing ovation, as she was overcome with “a sense of having flown very high and landed incompletely, her soul pulling upward out of her chest”(St. John Mandel 59). The connotation associated with the words “flown very high” and “soul pulling upward” insinuate that Kirsten is in a moment of utter joy, utmost happiness that she achieved through performing. The text reads that this sensation “always came over her”(St. John Mandel 59) after her performances, illustrating the fact that when she performs, this almost magical feeling comes over her every time. This helps demonstrate the fact that the arts have the power of expression, and putting your heart and soul into your art for others to enjoy has a therapy like effect, and truly heals the soul, solidifying the importance of art in society and human identity.

Art indeed has many aspects to it, being sung, written, acted, by the rich and the poor, the old and the young, in ancient times as well as recent ones. It's incredible ability to bring people joy as an artist does their work is a magical thing, and it also brings communities together, only furthering its impact on our lives. Over time, art has proven to be truly important to our society and to our identity as humans, and will continue to do so until the end of time.

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