Student-Generated Discussion Questions for "Story of Your Life" and *Arrival* (Fall 2026)

The questions below are based on questions submitted by students during our first class of Week 13. I have changed the wording, and in some cases combined similar questions. You do not need to discuss all of these questions. Instead, read through them and choose which ones you think would make for the most interesting discussions in your group.

On Free Will, Love, and Death

1. If all of our choices and their outcomes are predetermined, is it fair to hold human beings responsible for their actions?

2. Is it love or selfishness to bring someone you love into the world, even when you know they will face a painful future?

3. Why was the cause of the daughter's death changed in the film version compared to the story?

4. Imagine that, after making an important choice between two options in the past, you are given one more chance to choose differently. Would you choose the same, or differently?

On Time and Perception

5. If you gained the ability to see the future, what is the very first thing you would want to check or see?

6. If you knew everything about the future, do you think that you would feel like the future is "Real"?

7. The film portrays the Heptapods as using vocabulary that denotes "the future" or "the past." They state that their reason for coming to Earth is to receive humanity's help 3,000 years in the future. Yet, throughout the narrative, they are depicted as entities who simultaneously penetrate the vanished past, the existing present, and the the yet-to-come future. If such beings truly existed, why would they even require fragmented concepts of time like "past" and "present" and "future" in the first place?

On Language

8. With advanced AI, live translation of all languages is possible—no language barrier might exist in the future. How will this be different from using a single universal language for everyone on Earth?

9. Do you think that there is a difference between the Heptapods' spoken language and written language?

On the Heptapods

10. Why would aliens who are smarter than us need humanity's help in 3,000 years? (Could they need our help in a war, or might they need our intelligence to help them somehow?)

11. In the novella, the Heptapods leave Earth without ever explaining the reason for their visit, while in the movie, they say that they need humanity's help 3,000 years in the future. Would you have preferred the movie to leave the reason for their visit up to interpretation?

12. In the film, the heptapods offer an explanation for their visit to Earth. However, do you think they are being honest, or do you think there there is some possibility that they have a hidden purpose or plan (such as exploring the Earth to see if there is anything beneficial for them there) behind their decision to visit Earth?

13. If you had to teach aliens or some other species human languages, how would you teach them? Which language would you choose to teach them, or do you think it would be necessary to teach them multiple "human" languages at the same time?