

Student-Generated Discussion Questions for “Story of Your Life” and *Arrival* (Spring 2026)

The questions below are based on questions submitted by students during our first class of Week 14. 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.

General Questions:

1. Do you consider “Story of Your Life” an SF story? Why or why not?
2. In the title of the story, whose life is referred to as “your life”?
3. What is the biggest difference between the film and the story it is based on, and how did that difference affect your interpretation of the story?

Questions About Language & Learning:

4. Given that humans haven’t even been able to communicate with animals on our own planet up until now, do you think it is really possible for humans to communicate with aliens from another planet?
5. Do you think it’s really true that language deeply influences the way people think? For example, if we don’t have a word for a specific feeling, is it possible for us to feel it, or to understand that feeling? In your experience, has learning another language ever changed the way you think?
6. Can the culturally specific meanings embedded in another language be fully and accurately conveyed when translated into one’s own language, or vice-versa?
7. Why is the language of the heptapods not just a means of communication, but also a tool? Are all languages tools? How does that word change the way we think about learning and using languages?
8. If you could learn to communicate with any animal species on Earth, which animal would you want to talk with? How do you think talking with this specific species might change how you think?

Questions About Seeing the Future and Causality:

9. Do you think knowledge of the future—good and bad—would be a blessing, or a curse? More generally, does knowing the truth free us, or make us unhappy?
10. Do you believe that Louise actually fell in love with Ian independently, or that she married him based on what she saw would happen in the future? If you were in her position, and knew a

relationship would end badly, would you still choose to start that relationship? Does its future end make love more precious, or does it cause love to fade?

11. In this story, many people focus on whether or not they would do the same as Louise, and whether they would choose to have a child, knowing the child was destined to die young. However, what choice do you think Louise's daughter would have made, if she had the chance? Would you choose to live, if you were destined to die young?
12. Imagine that after the end of this story, Louise spent her life teaching other people the aliens' language, so that many humans learned it. How do you think the ability to see the future would change our world? How would our conception of time change, and would this be good for humanity?
13. What do you think would happen if animals were also allowed to learn the alien's language and they became able to see the future?
14. Why do you think Louise did not act to prevent her daughter's death? Why do you think the daughter's death is different in the film (terminal illness) from in the story (accidental death)?
15. If, like Louise, you gained the ability to see the future, would you spend your life simply living out what you had seen beforehand, or would you spend your life attempting to resist what you'd seen and try to change the future? If you did choose to live out what you saw, would that actually be a choice made out of free will? Does perfectly knowing the future make one's decisions more important, or less important?
16. Do you think human beings have free will?

Questions About the Heptapod Aliens:

17. If the aliens already knew what would happen in the future, then surely the aliens could have used English to communicate with Earth. Why did they choose not to do so?
18. Why did the aliens come to humanity for help when they already knew the future?
19. If the heptapods were real and visited Earth, would you choose to do: welcome them, or be unwelcoming to them?
20. Do you think Louise's ability to see the future was an accidental side-effect of learning the aliens' language, or do you think the heptapods let her see the future on purpose?