[*2001: A Space Odyssey*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062622/); MGM, 1968; Directed by Stanley Kubrick; Starring Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood; Rated G; [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHjIqQBsPjk).

Summary:

Before man landed on the moon there was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, so believable that some insisted the Apollo 11 mission simply had to be a hoax if Stanley Kubrick could produce the images he did. Kubrick—of *The Shining*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *A Clockwork Orange* fame—worked with sci-fi writer Arthur C. Clarke to create a story that is communicated primarily visually. The first and last twenty-five minutes have no dialogue, in a film full of scenes that are dialogue-free more often than not. Recognized now as the greatest science-fiction film ever made—perhaps with the exception of *Star Wars*—and by many as *the* greatest film, Kubrick’s story of evolution journeys from ape to man to…something beyond what it means to be human.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Evolution. Each stage of nature’s history is shown as part of a progression. Apes evolve, as does humanity, machines, and knowledge. However, each jump in evolution involves murder.
* Monoliths. The four black monoliths acts as catalysts for advancement. Their source and function are godlike.
* Survival. The apes fight for survival, as do Bowman and even HAL. Each being is shown as having primeval programming to preserve itself.
* Artificial Intelligence. HAL is meant to mimic humans but also to supersede them. Eventually, he either goes insane or displays a propensity for malice.
* Star Child. Similar to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, the Star Child is the product of evolutionary leaps: ape to man to spaceman to Overman.
* Suite. The bedroom suite in which Bowman grows old, dies, and is resurrected as the Star Child contains art and references to art throughout history.
* Music. *The Blue Danube* makes spaceflight a cinematic ballet. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* accentuates the three heavenly bodies that bookend the film while also referencing Nietzsche’s novel, in which we find the quote “God is dead.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare HAL to Frankenstein’s monster.
2. Kubrick said that “the film's plot symbolizes the search for God.” How so?
3. If most stories follow an arc of creation, fall, and redemption, where are those movements in this film?
4. What elements of technology in the film were prescient? Not yet achieved?
5. Relate scenes, characters, or the plot to Homer’s *Odyssey*.
6. Is this a parable? An allegory?
7. Is HAL evil?
8. Why is there such little dialogue? What does this achieve?
9. How does the film align with or depart from the idea of a prime mover?
10. Is the ending optimistic or pessimistic?
11. Read the short story by Arthur C. Clarke “[The Sentinal](http://econtent.typepad.com/TheSentinel.pdf)”, upon which the film is based. Compare and contrast.
12. How does Nietzsche’s [*Parable of the Madman*](https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/nietzsche-madman.asp) relate.
13. Is the film about cycles or progressions?
14. If this is a quest story, what is the quest for?