

“First Man” starring Ryan Gosling, Claire Foy, Jason Clarke, 2018, PG-13, 141 minutes

Major themes:

- Moon
- Space exploration
- Space race
- Family
- Stress
- Emotions
- Adventure
- Commitment
- Resourcefulness
- Perseverance
- Determination

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Major characters:

- Neil & Janet Armstrong
- Ed & Pat White
- Gus Grissom
- Roger Chaffee
- Deke Slayton
- Buzz Aldrin
- Elliot See
- Dave Scott
- Bob Gilruth
- James Lovell
- Mike Collins
- Pete Conrad

Background info:

- This film is based on the book, *"First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong"* (James R. Hansen). It won an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects and a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score.
- One of the film's taglines is, *"One giant leap into the unknown."*
- Other than the Kennedy Space Center scenes, filming took place in Atlanta, Georgia. All of the residential scenes were filmed in the "Saddle Creek" neighborhood in Roswell. A replica of Neil Armstrong's house was built on a vacant lot in the subdivision. Some of the moon sequences were filmed at the Vulcan Rock Quarry in Stockbridge.
- The film utilized actual NASA transmissions and recordings.
- NASA's manned spaceflight programs include X-15 rocket plane (1959-1968), Project Mercury (1958-1963), Project Gemini (1961-1966), Apollo program (1961-1972), and Skylab (1965-1979).

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- Neil Armstrong's son, Mark Armstrong, has a small role in this film playing the part of Paul Haney, who worked in the Mission Control Center as the "*Voice of Mission Control*".
- In the breakfast scene just before Apollo 11 launched, NASA sketch artist Paul Calle was played by his own son Chris Calle.
- Buzz Aldrin mentions his Personal Preference Kit (PPK), which was a small pouch in which the astronauts could choose to carry personal items along on the trip. Along with other items, Buzz included a small silver cup, a communion wafer, and a small container of communion wine, which he used when on the moon.
- The filmmakers' choice to not depict the planting of the U.S. flag on the lunar surface led critics and politicians from both major American political parties to debate the film's stance on patriotism.
- A UPI newspaper article from April 2nd, 1965 entitled, "NASA Clears Up the Way Gemini Is Pronounced" states: "*Regardless of what the dictionary says, the Federal space agency's official pronunciation for its new man-in-space program, Gemini, is 'Jiminy', as in 'Jiminy Cricket'.*" Bob Jacobs, a spokesman for NASA, said that the "*knee*" pronunciation is part of the agency's culture, and serves almost as an insider's shibboleth — a word whose proper delivery identifies you as someone in the know. "*If you get it right,*" he said, "*you're part of the space club.*"
- Two months before Apollo 11, astronauts Thomas Stafford and Eugene Cernan flew the Apollo 10 "dress rehearsal" lunar module—nicknamed after the cartoon dog "*Snoopy*"—to within about 50,000 feet of the moon's surface. Once this objective was achieved, the astronauts re-docked with the command module—dubbed "*Charlie Brown*"—to demonstrate this procedure, before the lunar module was jettisoned off into space. Since then, Snoopy's location has remained a mystery, but in June 2019, a group of scientists led by amateur astronomer Nick Howes—a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in the U.K.—say they are "*98 percent convinced,*" that they have found it.

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Scriptures:

Genesis 1:1 (ESV) – *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

Psalms 148:1-6 (The Message) – *“Hallelujah! Praise God from heaven, praise him from the mountaintops; praise him, all you his angels, praise him, all you his warriors, praise him, sun and moon, praise him, you morning stars; praise him, high heaven, praise him, heavenly rain clouds; praise, oh let them praise the name of God—he spoke the word, and there they were! He set them in place from all time to eternity; He gave his orders, and that’s it!”*

Psalms 6:2-4 (NLT) – *“Have compassion on me, LORD, for I am weak. Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony. I am sick at heart. How long, O LORD, until you restore me? Return, O LORD, and rescue me. Save me because of your unfailing love.”*

Psalms 119:143-144 (NLT) – *“As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands. Your laws are always right; help me to understand them so I may live.”*

Matthew 5:8 (The Message) – *“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.”*

Psalms 34:1-9 (The Message) – *“I bless God every chance I get; my lungs expand with his praise. I live and breathe God; if things aren’t going well, hear this and be happy: Join me in spreading the news; together let’s get the word out. God met me more than halfway, he freed me from my anxious fears. Look at him; give him your warmest smile. Never hide your feelings from him. When I was desperate, I called out, and God got me out of a tight spot. God’s angel sets up a circle of protection around us while we pray. Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—how good God is. Blessed are you who run to him. Worship God if you want the best; worship opens doors to all his goodness.”*

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Discussion points:

1. *"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."* When you think about this famous statement, what comes to mind?
2. Neil Armstrong said, *"I don't know what space exploration will uncover, but I don't think it'll be exploration just for the sake of exploration. I think it'll be more the fact that it allows us to see things. That maybe we should have seen a long time ago. But just haven't been able to until now."* What do you think we've been able to see that we hadn't been able to see before the advent of space exploration?
3. This film infamously omitted depicting Armstrong and Aldrin planting the American flag on the moon. What legacy do you see resulting from the "space race"?
4. When we look back at historical moments such as this, we might not realize that great achievements often come with much pain, risk, and sacrifice. Whom did you notice paid such a price in this film?
5. For what would you be willing to risk it all?
6. With which character in this film do you most identify, and why?
7. Which (and whose) emotions did you notice? Which (and whose) emotions were noticeable by their absence?