BACKGROUND: 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY tells of an adventure that has not yet happened, but which many people—scientists, philosophers, writers and engineers—think will happen, and perhaps very soon. The adventure is the first contact that the human race—we on the planet Earth—will have with life elsewhere in the Universe, on its many other planets.

What are the beings that inhabit these worlds? Will we be able to recognize them or will they appear so alien that if we were to see them we would hardly know them as intelligent life at all? Will they be biological life forms, machines or even disembodied creatures of pure energy? Will they be hostile toward us, or will they think that we are so primitive that they will pass us by and look elsewhere for other beings more nearly equal to them? If we get a signal from outer space, what should we do about it? Should we answer it and invite visitors, or should we ignore it and continue to live in the Universe as if we are alone? Or have we already been visited? Has some extraterrestrial civilization left artifacts for us to find when we get to the moon or the planet Mars? If we find life in the Universe—perhaps beings more intelligent than ourselves—what will we come to think of ourselves, our problems, our quarrels and our struggles, all of which take place on an obscure rocky planet not far from one of billions of average stars?

DEBATE: With a partner, please discuss and respond to the following questions:

1. What form will advanced or alien life forms most likely take? What is the next, most logical step in evolution? Will the creatures we may one day encounter be biological life forms, machines, or beings of pure energy?
2. Should we pursue contact with other life forms, or should we adopt a more isolationist approach? Explain your reasoning.
3. If we do encounter an alien race—either in space or here on Earth—how will that contact make us feel about ourselves as a species? Will it change the way we view ourselves, and our place in the universe? What are the most likely, most human reactions to the knowledge that we are not alone?

2001: a space odyssey OFFERS ONLY POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO THESE VERY REASONABLE QUESTIONS, BUT PLEASE REMEMBER: THIS IS ONLY A WORK OF FICTION.

THE TRUTH, AS ALWAYS, WILL BE FAR STRANGER.

--ARTHUR C. CLARKE, 1968.
INTRODUCTION: It is a barren, desolate period on pre-historic Earth. A remorseless drought has lasted now for ten million years, and will continue for another million. Creatures struggle to survive, competing for the land’s meager resources. The situation looks most perilous for the man-apes. In this dry and barren land, only the small, the swift or the fierce may hope to live. The man-apes, however, have none of these attributes, and they are on the long, pathetic road to extinction. They are cold, hungry, and nearing their deaths...until the coming of a most unexpected savior—one that leads the apes into the next phase of their evolution.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Section I.

1. This film is entitled 2001: A Space Odyssey. With that in mind, what is ironic about the opening scenes?
2. Describe the life led by the apes seen in the first few scenes. Why do they fight over the water pool?
3. What unusual object do the apes find? What effect does it have on them?
4. What two things does the ape learn to do with the bone?
5. Kubrick cuts immediately from the bone in the air to a floating spaceship. What does this cut tell us, and what is the connection Kubrick wants us to draw between the bone and the spaceship?
6. What does the choice of music and length of scene tell us about how Kubrick wants us to view the spacecraft in the scenes that follow?

Section II.

7. In space, we meet Dr. Heywood Floyd. Where is he going, and what is mysterious about the place?
8. What are some examples of Kubrick showing the audience advanced technology based on already-existing machines or concepts? Note all you can find.
9. Throughout the space station scene, Kubrick inserts several recognizable “brand names.” Find as many as you can. Why would Kubrick want to include these elements in a futuristic film?
10. How is the encounter with the “monolith” on the moon similar to the prehistoric humans’ experience with such an object?
INTRODUCTION: Eighteen months have passed since the "waking" of the monolith on the moon’s surface. Its deafening signal was released in one certain direction—the planet Jupiter—and now, the crew of the space ship Discovery makes its way to that distant location. The crewmembers rest in suspended animation except for Dave Bowman and Frank Poole, the astronauts in charge of the mission. Aiding Dave and Frank in their task is the HAL 9000 computer—the latest in artificial intelligence. HAL is in full control of ship’s operations, and is completely incapable of error. Or is he…?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

11. How is the HAL 9000 different from computers that we have today?
12. Does the HAL 9000 seem to possess any human qualities? What are they?
13. What concerns about the mission does HAL share with astronaut Dave Bowman?
14. What error does HAL detect? Describe the reaction to his discovery.
15. If HAL is wrong about his prediction, what danger does that pose to the mission?
16. Why do astronauts Frank Poole and Dave Bowman have their conversation inside the pod? What are they concerned about?
17. What happens to Frank Poole? Why?
18. What reasons are offered by HAL for his recent behavior?
19. Dave must re-enter the ship in an unusual way. What is dangerous about this attempt?
20. What action does Dave take toward HAL?
21. What information about HAL is revealed by the prerecorded message discovered by Dave Bowman?
22. How does HAL further reveal his emotional/human side in this section? Please describe as many instances as you can in which HAL acts in a human manner.
23. Why, in your opinion, did HAL malfunction?

CHARACTERS. Please write a one-sentence description of each of the following.

DR. HEYWOOD FLOYD: ____________________________________________________

DAVID BOWMAN: _____________________________________________________

FRANK POOLE: _______________________________________________________

HAL 9000: ___________________________________________________________
INTRODUCTION:  As the last survivor of the Discovery, astronaut Dave Bowman is left to complete the mission. Millions of miles from home and approaching the orbit of Jupiter, Dave realizes that he has never known the true purpose of the Discovery’s flight. His journey leads him to encounter a third monolith, and takes him to the very ends of his universe—and his existence. What Dave finds after his ordeal is both unexpected and the subject of great mystery, debate, and wonder...leading to the film’s thought-provoking final images.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

24. What happens to Dave Bowman as he approaches the monolith in orbit around Jupiter?
25. Describe the images seen as Bowman proceeds on his journey.
26. What sort of room does Bowman end up in? Describe it in detail.
27. Who is the old man? What connection does he have to Dave Bowman, if any? Explain.
28. Near the film’s conclusion, the old man in the bed reaches out to yet another monolith. Does this object function in the same way as the previous three? Explain.
29. What, in your opinion, is the creature seen in the film’s final images?
30. Is this a satisfying conclusion to the film? Why or why not? Explain your opinion.

ANALYSIS:

IN WHAT WAYS IS THE FILM 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY SIMILAR TO THE SHORT STORY “THE SENTINEL”? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT? IN THE SPACE BELOW, PLEASE BRAINSTORM AT LEAST THREE SIMILARITIES AND THREE DIFFERENCES: