NEWS LESSON

Saving the World by Getting Things Wrong



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you rather explore space or the bottom of the sea?
2. What makes a film about science exciting?
3. Who would you want beside you when a plan goes wrong?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**organisms**	☐	A	changes a book or play so it can become a film
2	**absorbing**	☐	B	damage so bad that nothing is left
3	**plausibility**	☐	C	a meeting, often an unexpected one
4	**adapts**	☐	D	connected with making money
5	**commercial**	☐	E	living things, such as tiny animals or plants
6	**distinctive**	☐	F	clearly different from other things
7	**destruction**	☐	G	taking in a liquid, light or energy
8	**encounter**	☐	H	how likely something is to be true

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Ryan Gosling plays a teacher who meets an alien with the same problem. Their slow attempt to understand each other is the heart of the film.

1 A man comes round aboard a spacecraft, unable to remember his name or how he got there. His crewmates are dead, Earth is a very long way away and the future of humanity may depend on what he does next.

2 It sounds like the beginning of a familiar Hollywood disaster film. But Project Hail Mary, released in March 2026, has an unusual hero. Ryland Grace, played by Ryan Gosling, is a science teacher whose most valuable equipment is not a weapon but his ability to think his way through problems.

3 Grace has been sent to investigate a mysterious threat to the Sun. In the story, tiny alien organisms are absorbing energy from stars, putting life on Earth at risk. His destination is a distant star system where researchers believe the answer may lie. Rather than relying on spectacular battles, much of the drama comes from small experiments, unexpected failures and improvised solutions. He is knowledgeable, but he is hardly the fearless astronaut usually found at the centre of a blockbuster.

4 The film adapts Andy Weir's bestselling 2021 novel. Weir is known for filling his fiction with scientific detail, and the filmmakers wanted to hold on to that quality. NASA specialists offered advice during production, while the story uses real stars such as Tau Ceti and 40 Eridani. Nevertheless, plausibility has its limits. Astrophage, the fictional organism responsible for the crisis, would need to absorb an almost unimaginable amount of energy. Scientists have pointed out that the way Astrophage stores energy does not fit known physics. The film invites viewers to accept one enormous invention, then takes many of its smaller scientific questions seriously.

5 Its emotional centre is an encounter that would be difficult to imagine in most disaster films. Grace meets Rocky, an alien trying to protect his own world from the same danger. They cannot easily speak to one another, and their bodies work in very different ways. Gradually, however, they come up with ways to communicate and combine their knowledge. Instead of presenting alien life as something automatically threatening, the film asks what two strangers might achieve if they choose cooperation over fear.

6 Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller bring an energetic, comic style to the adaptation. The film became a commercial success, earning more than $680 million worldwide, although reviews were not entirely unanimous. Some critics welcomed its warmth and imagination; others questioned its shifts between jokes and an extinction-level emergency. The novel and the film also place different demands on their audiences: a book can spend pages on calculations, while a film must make the same discoveries understandable in a matter of seconds.

7 What makes Project Hail Mary distinctive is not that it gets every scientific detail right. It is the pleasure it takes in curiosity itself. Problems are investigated rather than simply overcome by force, and the most important breakthrough comes through an unlikely partnership. In an era when space adventures often concentrate on destruction, a blockbuster about asking better questions feels like a refreshing change.

Sources: Scientific American. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Reviews of the film were unanimous. T F NG
2. Using real stars makes the threat of Astrophage scientifically realistic. T F NG
3. A sequel has been announced. T F NG
4. A novel can explain a calculation in more detail than a film usually can. T F NG
5. Rocky is an alien who wants to protect his own world. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

ambitious **breakthrough** **cooperation** **knowledgeable** **refreshing** **reluctant** **spectacular** **unanimous**

1. The committee reached a _____ decision: every member voted in favour.
2. The tour guide was so _____ that she answered every question about the stars.
3. After years of failed tests, the team finally made a _____ that changed the project.
4. Fireworks over the harbour were _____ : the whole sky lit up.
5. After so many noisy sequels, a quiet film felt like a _____ change.
6. Neighbouring countries solved the water shortage through _____ rather than competition.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time Grace woke up, his crewmates _____ . (DIE)
2. The film _____ by millions of people since it came out. (SEE)
3. If Grace had given up, humanity _____ no hope. (HAVE)
4. While Grace _____ an experiment, an alarm went off. (RUN)
5. Grace _____ a decision quickly, because the Sun is getting weaker. (HAVE TO MAKE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some phrasal verbs take an object (hold on to something), and some do not (the machine broke down). Check what follows the gap.

across	along	down	on	out	through	up

1. The crew is running _____ of time.
2. The first experiment broke _____ before the team could finish it.
3. The filmmakers wanted to hold _____ to the novel's scientific detail.
4. Grace has to think his way _____ each problem.
5. Grace and Rocky team _____ against the same danger.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would an ordinary person make a more interesting hero than a superhero?
2. What could make people trust someone very different from them?
3. Which everyday skill might be surprisingly useful in space?

9 Role-play: the book or the film first?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the reader
You want your friend to read the novel before you both see the film. Explain why the book is worth the time. Listen, then agree on a plan.

Student B · the film fan
You want to see the film this weekend, before people tell you the story. Explain why. Listen, then agree on a plan.

Useful phrases

I'd rather read the book first.
That's a fair point, but it's a long book.
What if we watched it and then read it?
I don't want anyone to spoil the ending.
I'm not sure the film can explain all the science.
Let's agree on a plan.

Afterwards, tell the class what you decided and why.

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 G · 3 H · 4 A · 5 D · 6 F · 7 B · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 unanimous · 2 knowledgeable · 3 breakthrough · 4 spectacular · 5 refreshing · 6 cooperation

6 Verb forms

1 had died · 2 has been seen · 3 would have had · 4 was running · 5 has to make or must make

7 Language focus

1 out · 2 down · 3 on · 4 through · 5 up

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