

## A Beautiful Mind(2001)



**Directed by Ron Howard**

**Written by** Sylvia Nasar (book), Akiva Goldsman (screenplay)

**Genre:** Drama / Romance / Biography (Based on a true story)

"He Saw The World In A Way No One Could Have Imagined."

**User Rating: 7.8 stars out of 10** (26,549 votes)

**Runtime:** 136 min

**Country:** USA

The Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash still teaches at Princeton University, and walks to campus every day. This brilliant mathematician was also a victim of schizophrenia. Nash's discoveries in game theory have an impact on our lives every day. He also believed for a time that Russians were sending him coded messages on the front page of the New York Times.

"A Beautiful Mind" stars Russell Crowe as Nash, and Jennifer Connelly as his wife, Alicia, who is pregnant with their child when the first symptoms of his disease become apparent. It tells the story of a man whose mind was of great value to humanity but also betrayed him with frightening delusions.

Director Ron Howard is able to suggest a core of goodness in Nash that inspired his wife and others to stand by him, to keep hope and, in her words in his darkest hour, "to believe that something extraordinary is possible." The movie's Nash begins as a quiet but rather arrogant young man who gradually turns into a tortured, secretive paranoid who believes he is a spy being trailed by government agents.

The young Nash is aware of his impact on others ("I don't much like people and they don't much like me") and recalls that his first-grade teacher said he was "born with two helpings of brain and a half-helping of heart." It is Alicia who helps him find the heart. She is a graduate student when they meet, is attracted to his genius, is touched by his loneliness, is able to accept his idea of courtship when he informs her, "Ritual requires we proceed with a number of platonic activities before we have sex." To the degree that he can be touched, she touches him, although often he seems trapped inside himself;

Nash's schizophrenia takes a literal, visual form. He believes he is being pursued by a federal agent (Ed Harris), and imagines himself in chase scenes that seem inspired by 1940s crime movies. He begins to find patterns where no patterns exist. One night he and Alicia stand under the sky and he asks her to name any object, and then connects stars to draw it. Romantic, but it's not so romantic when she discovers his office thickly papered with countless bits torn from newspapers and magazines and connected by frantic lines into imaginary patterns.

The movie traces his treatment by an understanding psychiatrist (Christopher Plummer), and his agonizing courses of insulin shock therapy. Medication helps him improve somewhat--but only, of course, when he takes the medication. Eventually newer drugs are more effective, and he begins a tentative re-entry into the academic world at Princeton.

For many years Nash was a recluse, wandering the campus, talking to no one, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, paging through piles of newspapers and magazines. And then one day he paid a quite ordinary compliment to a colleague about his daughter, and it was noticed that Nash seemed better.

There is a remarkable scene in the movie when a representative for the Nobel committee (Austin Pendleton) comes visiting, and hints that he is being "considered" for the prize. Nash observes that people are usually informed they have won, not that they are being considered: "You came here to find out if I am crazy and would screw everything up if I won." He did win, and did not screw everything up.

Discussion :

1. Which scene in the film do you find most memorable and why?
2. What do you think of the relationship between Nash and his wife? Do you think you would be able to love and live with a person like Nash?
3. Were you sometimes confused about what was "real" in the film? Do you think this was meaningful and effective, or just confusing?
3. Describe your feelings at the end of the film.
4. When he won the Nobel, Nash was asked to write about his life, and he was honest enough to say his recovery is *"not entirely a matter of joy."* Do you think Nash's mental illness contributed to his brilliance? If becoming "normal" meant losing your brilliance, what would you choose?
5. In your view, what is the "main message" of the film?

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To read John Nash's autobiographical statement on the Nobel Prize website, go to: <http://www.nobel.se/economics/laureates/1994/nash-autobio.html>



**John Nash**

Sylvia Nasar, who wrote the 1998 biography of John Nash, begins her book by quoting the poet Wordsworth about **"a man forever voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone."**

**Q: What made you decide to write his biography?**

**A (Sylvia Nasar):** Because I was sure other people would find his story fascinating, too. Nash's miraculous remission is so inspiring. After my New York Times article, "The Lost Years of the Nobel Laureate," ran in the fall of 1994, I got a letter from a former editor (at the New York Times) who--as it turned out--had been living on the streets of Berkeley for the past 25 years. Saying that he suffered from the same illness as Nash, he wrote, "Nash's story gave me hope that one day the world would come back to me too. " I'll never forget that.