

FIRST DATE



COMING FALL 2025





* Link to all Downloadable Headshots, Posters, BTS, and Media

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10bK9rXwZ1pxMrTVLgFvK7VjueZ5rnkwh?usp=sharing>

Link to Director's Website: www.haileyvest.com *

Logline

When the new kid gets asked out on his first date, he must navigate how to stay true to himself amidst the pressure to fit in.

Short Synopsis

Leo's first day at a new school comes with a first crush, a first date, and a first-of-its-kind challenge: navigating dating as a trans man while surrounded by societal double standards and unconscious transphobia.

Synopsis

Leo arrives on his first day of senior year at a brand new school. He meets Sarah, the most spunky brainiac he's ever seen. They immediately hit off and she asks him out. Elated, he races home to tell his parents the good news and their first question is: "does she know?" This is Leo's first date ever... but also his first date as a trans man and completely new territory for the family.

This raises the question, "is he required to tell Sarah before the date or when he's actually comfortable and ready?" Through this the family and the audience must unpack common societal double standards, cis privilege, as well as unconscious transphobia.

Full Synopsis

Leo arrives on his first day of senior year at a brand new school excited for a fresh start, but like all teenagers is anxious what others will think of him. He meets his new class filled with the usual suspects: bullies, jocks, and Sarah, the most spunky brainiac he's ever seen. They immediately hit off and she asks him out.

Elated, he runs home to tell his parents who are excited but also concerned. This is Leo's first date... but also his first date as a trans man. From multiple points of view, the family grapples if Leo is required to tell Sarah he's trans before the date or when he feels comfortable and ready.

That night, Leo overhears his parents argue over the presumed societal "ethics" of the situation. Throughout the fight, he realizes his parent's marriage has hit a tipping point and his father deep down doesn't truly affirm his transition.



Leo crumples with self doubt if he wants to tell Sarah because he wants to or because he thinks that's what his father and society expects of him. On the date, Leo learns his own self love matters more than what others think and tells Sarah because he wants to rather than because he has to.

Through these 18 minutes, the family as well as the audience must unpack the common societal double standards, cis privilege, as well as conscious and unconscious transphobia.

At A Glance

Title: First Date

Genre: Coming of Age, Slice of Life, Family Drama

Sub Genres: LGBTQIA+ Rights, Human Rights, Social Justice, Self Love

Theme: Everyone deserves a first date

Tone: Moving, Realistic, Thought Provoking, Heartfelt

Run Time: 18min 40sec (18min film, 40sec credits)

Script Length: 18 Pages

School: New York Film Academy: 1 Year Filmmaking Conservatory

Year of Completion: October 2025

Country of Origin: United States of America

Locations: New Jersey, New York City, and Brooklyn

Languages: English with translated Spanish subtitles

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Format: Digital, 4K, shot on a RED

Rating/Content Warning: PG-13 (mild language and brief showing of healing top surgery scars)

Central Topics

With this first date, a basic life milestone, the family and audience must explore the double standards of today's society. This film covers societal bias, true gender affirmation, conscious and unconscious transphobia, projecting cis heterosexual privilege, generational gender roles, the hardships of parenting, and what it truly means to love yourself.



Leo lost in thought in Spanish Class
(Chris Allyah and Students)



Susan and Leo share a meaningful hug
(Chris Allyah and Jamie Rugusa)

Meet the Cast

Chris Allyah as Leo Anderson

Chris Allyah (he/him) is a queer artist with a passion for acting in all its forms, especially comedic improv. He recently graduated from Muhlenberg College with a degree in Theatre and Media & Communications. He's a creator who loves music, singing, editing and always wants to share queer and trans joy.



Jamie Rugusa as Susan Anderson

Jamie Rugusa (she/her) is a TV/Film, and Stage actor based in NY. She is a proud member of Sag-Aftra and AEA. She has studied at Maggie Flanigan Studio, The Barrow Group, Lee Strasberg Institute, and is currently a working finalist at The Actor's Studio in NYC. She holds a BFA and MA from Point Park University. TV credits include FBI (CBS), BULL (CBS). NYC Theater "oH Honey" and "Horseshoe Empire."



Jeremy Lister as Paul Anderson

Jeremy Lister (he/him) is an actor based in New York City with an MFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. His recent credits include "Bastards" (Paradox Films), "Professional Therapy" (Stonybrook Productions), and "The Table Round/The Siege Perilous" (Turn to Flesh Productions). He is very excited to have been a part of *First Date* due to the high caliber of artists involved and the value of the conversation the story promotes.



Isabella Bria Lopez as Sarah Baldwin

Isabella Bria Lopez (she/her) is a performer from Annapolis Maryland, now living and working in New York City. She's known for her work in Mean Girls (2024), Evita at ART, and Reagle Theatre. She's extremely grateful to be a part of *First Date*.



(All Cast Headshots available in google drive folder)

Director Bio

Hailey Vest is a New York based actor, writer, and director originally from Colorado. After training for acting at the Savannah College of Arts and Design (SCAD), the Maggie Flanigan Studio, and the New York Film Academy's Filmmaking Conservatory, she's finally stepped behind the camera for her debut short film, *First Date*.

Vest is known for blending naturalistic visuals with character-driven storytelling. Often exploring human connection, identity, and social justice while simultaneously holding a mirror to her audience. Outside of filmmaking, she enjoys hiking, walks with her dog Herbaceous, and a good aperol spritz.



Hailey Vest (she/her)
Writer, Director, and Producer of *First Date*

Director Statement

A first date is a universal experience... So what if you weren't guaranteed one?

As a director, actor, and writer, I'm drawn to stories that start conversations. The majority of my work revolves around equality, human rights, and authentic representation... specifically without punching down. I believe we are all more similar than we are different, a film is a medium that can expand our understanding of the human experience and build connection. Every film I make is a conversation, a reflection, and an invitation. So, I invite you: What would you do? How would you react? How would you feel?

Because at the end of the day, everyone deserves a first date.

FAQ with Hailey Vest

Q: What inspired you to tell this story?

A: During the summer of 2024, I read Mad Honey by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan, which explores LGBTQIA+ rights and cis privilege. When talking about it, I kept hearing reactions like "I'd need to know" or "that's not right" which made me realize how much unconscious transphobia can exist, even among allies. I wanted to unpack that mindset, and this story grew from that impulse.

FAQ with Hailey Vest

Q: When did you first start working on First Date?

A: I began writing First Date that summer (2024). Although the topic was somewhat controversial, it wasn't considered political... my how times have changed. My aim was to create a film that unites viewers of all beliefs by exploring basic human rights through the universal experience of a first date. It began—and remains—a human-rights story.

Q: What kind of research went into creating these characters?

A: Since this is a student film, I wasn't allowed to co-write with a trans writer, so research became essential. I grounded the story in real trans and queer experiences by studying laws and legislation, then immersing myself in books and especially podcasts—from trans kids, teens, adults, athletes, activists, artists, parents of trans kids, allies, and lawmakers. Leo, Susan, and Paul's journey is fictional but shaped by countless real experiences. Once the actors were cast, I worked closely with Chris, Jamie, and Jeremy to ensure Leo's portrayal felt authentic, and we were all approaching this film from perspective and education.

Q: What was the biggest challenge when writing the script?

A: The biggest challenge was writing a script inclusive for all audiences, regardless of beliefs. Leo's trans identity is never hidden, but viewers may realize it at different points. The goal is for everyone to root for Leo and Sarah early on, then reflect on their own judgments as the story unfolds, sparking conversation, self-reflection, or learning within the film's 18 minutes.

Q: Why did you choose an open ending?

A: The open ending invites the audience to imagine what happens next and spark conversation. The focus is on Leo's choice—not Sarah's reaction—highlighting his agency and what this moment means for him.

Q: What makes this project unique?

A: This film is unique because its drama is rooted in joy, not trauma. Instead of focusing on pain or bullying, it celebrates the excitement of a first date and Leo's desire for the same chance as anyone else. It also lives in the "middle" of acceptance—where parents aren't fully supportive or outright rejecting, but navigating their own internalized ideas about gender. Even Paul, the antagonist, is trying to love his son, though he often falls short.

FAQ with Hailey Vest

Q: What was the casting process like?

A: Casting was intense and lasted about six weeks. I've never cast anything this big or specific before, so it was quite daunting. Finding Leo was the top priority—he needed to be a trans actor who passed, looked high-school age, and was nonunion. Chris's first self-tape made it clear he was perfect, and he proved it again with an exceptional three-hour chemistry read.

Casting the parents was harder; after watching about 100 self-tapes, I found Jamie through my acting mentor and brought in Jeremy, whom I knew from SCAD. Once they read together, they were clearly the right fit.

For the school and restaurant scenes, I aimed for a genuinely inclusive high-school environment, featuring as many LGBTQIA+ students as possible. The extras were fantastic and helped build a believable senior-year world.

Q: What did you and the cast talk about most in rehearsals?

A: We spent rehearsals aligning on timelines, shared knowledge, and the deep love between the characters. We talked about how no one has a map—for life, gender roles, identity, growing up, or parenting—and what it feels like to constantly improvise and fear you're falling short. At its core, the story is about trying to love others and ourselves. We also focused on portraying Paul with compassion; though he functions as the antagonist, he's simply doing his best to love his child.

Q: Were there any challenges while filming?

A: We were fortunate overall, thanks to intense pre-production and an excellent team. We filmed for five days across New Jersey, New York City, and Brooklyn. Time was tight at the school location with 40+ people on set, but my ADs, Kenzie and Jess, managed the schedule brilliantly—especially when we needed more cafeteria coverage. We also had to pivot when a lightning storm forced us to move a rooftop scene into the gym, but it ended up working seamlessly.

Q: What do you hope audiences will take away from the film?

A: I hope audiences simply see Leo as a teen experiencing the joy and excitement of a first date, recalling their own first-date feelings and encouraging human-centered conversations. Ultimately, everyone deserves a first date.

FAQ with Chris Allyah: Leo

Q: What drew you to this role?

A: I was drawn to this role because I don't often see trans men in lead roles, especially ones that aren't centered on something overly negative and heavy. Leo is a happy trans boy with so much to offer, and I knew I wanted to bring his joy to the forefront.

FAQ with Chris Allyah: Leo



Q: What was the casting process like for Leo?

A: The casting process was exciting! I sent in a self tape for the first call back, then went to Pearl Studios to do chemistry reads. It was my first time in Pearl Studios, I got there way too early, and each time I got to read with someone, I felt like I learned more about Leo. The way he reacts to what he is given by others in the scene, his calm presence, wanting to make sure others are comfortable talking to him. Overall it made me fall in love with Leo more.

Q: What was the most challenging or rewarding part of making this film?

A: The most challenging part of the film was trying to represent a trans experience “correctly”. Everyone experiences being trans differently, this is only one story, but as the only trans man in the cast and crew, I did feel like I had a different perspective and I wanted to be careful and intentional about how certain moments were portrayed. Learning about Leo's experience and feeling both the similarities and differences we had was difficult, but so rewarding. I learned a lot about trans experiences beyond my own, and I'm really grateful for that.

Q: What was it like working with the director/cast?

A: Working with Hailey was such a wonderful experience — she made the process so welcoming, inclusive, and intentional. She knew exactly what she wanted and the best way to bring it all to life. I felt really involved in the process, and everything was clear to me because of the way she communicated and collaborated. The cast was so great to work with, even from the first table read over zoom all together we all were intentional of what we wanted to bring not only to these characters but to the film as a whole. Everyone was informed and educated on the subject for this to be represented correctly and in a good light.

Q: Any memorable moments on set?

A: Before we filmed a scene where Leo and his mom talk in his room, Jaime (Ragusa) and I had some time to sit outside before being called up. We talked about my trans experience, and she asked such wonderful questions that came from such a true place of wanting to know more about me and my experience, as well as transness as a whole. We had such a great conversation, I will definitely not forget it.

Q: What do you hope audiences will take away from the film?

A: I hope audiences walk away seeing a story rooted in trans joy and understand how important it is to include trans people and trans language in conversations. Leo is simply a boy who wants to go to school, go on dates, and be himself, and every kid deserves that opportunity no matter how they identify. I hope this film gives people a reason to start the conversations about transness that so many are hesitant to have.



Crew List

Director/Writer/Producer	Hailey Vest
Assistant Director	Kenzie Jepperson
2nd Assistant Director	Jessica VanGlad
Director of Photography	Alejandro Masso
Producer	Colin McReynolds
Production Designer	Samantha Ahnen
Prod Design Assistant	Delaney Flanagan
Composer	Bridger Dunnagan
Casting Director	Hailey Vest
Script Supervisor	Sabrina-Belle Dorrien
Gaffer	David Aguilar
Key Grip/Dolly Grip	Phoenix Talamantes
Best Boy Grip/Electric	Zhaun-Paul Draper
1st AC	Camila Noguez
2nd AC/Art Department	Valentina Galindo
Steadicam Op	Finn Field-Thompson
Sound Mixer	Robert OHaire
Boom Op	Alfred Giancarli (Alfi)
Colorist	David Aguilar
Editor/Post Sound Mixer	Hailey Vest
Production Manager	Tiffany Faykus
Costume Designer	Hailey Vest
Wardrobe Supervisor	Gigi Moacdieh
Production Assistant	Paige Daniel
BTS Photographer	Miller

