Chapter by chapter summaries

Author's note

The 'author' describes travelling to India in search of inspiration for a new novel. In Pondicherry he meets Francis Adirubasamy who offers him an incredible story and directs him to Canada to get the true story from the person who lived it – Piscine Patel.

The foreword with acknowledgements is in fact a mixture of fact and fiction and is a device the real author (Martel) uses to get the reader to believe that an entirely fictitious story is a true story. The setting of the story is a real place, Pondicherry. Although there is no longer a Pondicherry Zoo, the coffee house and the Botanical Gardens still exist. Martel, like the fictitious author, travelled to India after writing a failed novel set in Portugal. The fictitious author introduces Francis Adirubasamy as a real person, and includes him, Mr Patel, and Mr Okamoto in the acknowledgements. These fictitious characters are mentioned alongside the non-fictional Canada Council for the Arts, which in fact granted support to the real author, Martel, for writing Life of Pi. This blurring of the distinction between fact and fiction foreshadows Pi's own survival adventure which, by the end, could be seen as a blurring of fact and fiction. There are many facts about animal behaviour and, in Part Two, practical details of daily survival. The novel is a fiction and Martel deliberately stretches our credulity throughout Part Two, but particularly in Chapters 90–93 (see Themes – Life is a story/the “better story”, page 33 of this study guide).

Test yourself on the Author's note

1. Who is the real author of the Author's note? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Why did the 'author' travel to India?

PART ONE

Chapter 1

- In Canada, Piscine (Pi) Patel begins to tell the 'author' his story.
- Pi is a graduate of zoology and religious studies.
- He expresses his sadness that Richard Parker (whose identity we do not yet know) is no longer around and did not say goodbye to him.

The first chapter establishes the themes of the novel. Pi's detailed lectures on the behaviour of animals and their relationship with humans are interspersed between the events of his story, particularly in Part One. These not only reveal how much he knows about animal behaviour, but serve to make his story in Part Two believable. The topic of his zoological thesis at university “The thyroid gland of the three-toed sloth” sounds scientific, but Pi admits that he chose the sloth because of its soothing, spiritually calming nature and because it reminded him of God. This lack of clear boundaries between religious faith and science is one of the main themes of the novel.

Test yourself on Chapter 1

1. What were Pi’s two major subjects at university?

Part 2: Use summaries to revise
2. Why could he not clearly separate his two majors in his mind?
3. Does he explain who Richard Parker is at this point in the novel?

**Chapters 2 and 3**

Chapter 2 returns to the ‘author’s’ report on what he is starting to discover about Pi Patel. Pi describes Francis Adirubasamy, a friend of the Patel family who had taught Pi to swim.

- Pi was named Piscine Molitor after Adirubasamy’s favourite swimming pool in Paris.
- Of significance in terms of the story in Part Two:
  - Piscine is the only family member who can swim, and who swims well.
  - The play on the word ‘piscine’: the French piscine means swimming pool and in English it means fish-like.

**Test yourself on Chapters 2 and 3**

1. How did Piscine Molitor Patel get his name?
2. What role did Francis Adirumbasamy play in Pi’s childhood?

**Chapter 4**

- Piscine describes his childhood memories of Pondicherry Zoo.
- He argues that animals in a zoo are “happy” and “free” compared to those in the wild.

Piscine explains why people misunderstand the idea of animal captivity: animals in the zoo have a structure and a support system that make it easier for them to meet their needs without being driven by “fear and urgent necessity”, and thus they do not need or want to leave. This could suggest that humans also need a framework (God, religion) to meet their emotional and spiritual needs, making our lives more than “lives of compulsion and necessity”. His life in Part Two is to be one of “compulsion and necessity” but it is his religious faith that helps him through his ordeal. Martel is again showing how knowledgeable Pi is about animal behaviour to prepare us for Part Two. Pi’s argument about animals being free and happy in captivity foreshadows Chapter 94 when he imagines Richard Parker in “the free confinement of a jungle”.

**Answers on page 48**

**Test yourself on Chapter 4**

1. Was Piscine’s childhood a happy one? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What, according to Pi, are the reasons people imagine animals in the wild to be “happy” and “free”?
3. What is Pi’s counter argument to this?

**Chapters 5 and 6**

- Piscine explains how he came to be known as Pi: his classmates deliberately mispronounced his name as “pissing”.
- In Canada the ‘author’ observes Pi’s house is overheated and overstocked with food. Pi’s habit of hoarding food foreshadows Part Two and also hints at the reason for this habit.
Religious references from the Old and New Testaments and from Islam are to do with naming and identity. Piscine’s reply to a pizza guy, “I am who I am,” is God’s reply to Moses, and some followers of Jesus were known by more than one name. This suggests how life changes can accompany name changes. He compares his taunting to the persecution of Muhammad.

The symbolism of the name Pi (a mathematical symbol) is important to the tension/conflict between logic/rationality and what cannot be entirely explained rationally or scientifically, particularly in Part Two (see notes on the symbolism of Pi’s name on page 23 of this study guide).

Test yourself on Chapters 5 and 6

1. Why did Piscine change his name to Pi?
2. Why was his brother Ravi more popular than Pi at school?
3. What does π represent in mathematical terms?

Chapter 7

› Pi and Satish Kumar, his biology teacher, discuss religion.
› Pi realises Mr Kumar’s belief in science and his atheism are another form of religious faith.

Satish Kumar, seeking order and reason in the universe, shows faith in the scientific view rather than in God. Pi is able to accept Mr Kumar’s atheism because, although Kumar does not believe in God, he still believes and takes the “leap of faith” that reason leads him to.

Test yourself on Chapter 7

1. What reason does Mr Kumar give for not believing in religion?
2. What childhood experience confirmed his belief in science?
3. Why does Pi prefer atheists to agnostics (people who believe that it is impossible to know whether or not God exists)?

Chapters 8–11

› Pi remembers the terrible things zoo visitors do to injure and kill the animals.
› He remembers his father showing him and Ravi a tiger killing and eating a goat to teach them about the danger of wild animals.
› Pi describes in detail the science of zoo keeping and aspects of animal behaviour.
› He defines the concept of flight distance and how this can be diminished.
› He gives examples of animals that might want to escape from a zoo.

There are more religious references: Pi mentions the story from the Hindu epic the Ramayana about King Ravana kidnapping the goddess Sita. Mahisha, the tiger’s name, is the name of an evil demon defeated by the goddess Durga.

The details Pi gives of the behaviours of animals further establish Pi’s considerable knowledge about animals. Of particular significance for Part Two, is Pi’s knowledge of an animal’s flight distance.
1. Which animals do Pi and his father think are the most dangerous animals in the zoo and why?
2. What is *Animalus anthropomorphicus* and why did Pi’s father consider this species to be the most dangerous animal of all?
3. How did Pi feel after watching the tiger killing and devouring a goat?
4. What reasons does Pi give for zoo keepers needing to understand animal behaviour?

**Chapters 12–14**

- Every time the ‘author’ visits Pi, he cooks the ‘author’ very spicy food.
- Pi uses his knowledge of animal behaviour to describe how to tame a lion and other circus animals.

Pi’s information about the taming of lions and other circus animals is more preparation for Part Two and should be seen together with Pi’s father’s demonstration of the superior strength of the tiger in Chapter 8.

**Answers on page 48**

1. According to Pi, does a lion tamer need to have superior physical strength to make a lion submit to and obey him? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Why would a circus trainer prefer an omega animal to train over an alpha, beta or gamma animal?

**Chapters 15–17**

- The ‘author’ describes the artefacts and symbols from the three religions in Pi’s home in Canada. This description prepares us for Pi’s various religious experiences and discussions, which will make clear how and why the adult Pi ends up practising three different religions. Pi recalls or imagines his first visit as a baby to a Hindu temple.
- He shows the similarities between the Hindu, Christian and Islam religions.
- Father Martin answers Pi’s questions about Christianity.
- For Pi, Hinduism is a religion with many rich and sensual stories. Pi cannot understand Christ’s sacrifice and suffering and the starkness of the crucifixion story. At this point, although Pi accepts the inherent truths behind different religions, he still judges the “tales”, on which they are based.
- Pi is starting to understand and to feel that it is not one particular tale that is important; rather it is the need for each individual to have faith in a story, almost any story, that’s representative of his or her religious beliefs.
- The core similarities between religions is a theme running through the novel. Subsequent chapters focus on Catholicism (Christianity) and Islam as Pi develops his complex relationship with God. Pi does not see any contradiction in being led to Christ by the Hindu deity Krishna as Hinduism’s multiple stories and gods make this another story that enriches rather than conflicts with his existing beliefs.

**Answers on page 49**

1. What does the presence of artefacts from all three religions in Pi’s house tell us about the adult Pi?
2. What for Pi are the essential similarities between Hinduism, Christianity and Islam?
3. Why did Pi decide to become a Christian?

**Chapters 18–20**
- Pi wants to find out about Islam, but is afraid to go inside the Great Mosque.
- Instead he enters a local bakery and is moved by the baker's prayer ritual.
- Pi joins the prayer rituals in the mosque.
- The baker is a Sufi, or Muslim mystic.

Pi experiences a spiritual ecstasy after praying with the baker. The theme of the commonalities between religions is further developed. Another theme emerging is the idea that science and religion are both valid ways to understand the world. Mr Kumar the biology teacher and Mr Kumar the Sufi, each in his own way is a "prophet", or religious teacher, of Pi's youth, leading him to scientific understanding, and to religion. Both of these are to prove essential to his survival in Part Two. The adult Pi's memory of his vision of the Virgin Mary in Canada foreshadows that of Orange Juice in Chapter 42. Both symbolise innocence and love.

**Test yourself on Chapters 18–20**
1. Why does Pi want to find out about the Islam religion?
2. What effect does Pi's praying with the baker have on him?
3. Which religions does Pi follow and practise in Canada?

**Chapters 21 and 22**
- In Canada the 'author' reflects on Pi's views about religious faith, atheism and agnosticism. Agnostics state that we cannot know whether there is a God or not.
- Pi imagines an atheist and an agnostic respectively at their moment of death.

In Chapter 21 the 'author' shows the adult Pi's profound belief in love being the unifying force of his three religions. Pi imagines how an agnostic, by clinging to "dry, yeastless factuality" at the moment of death might miss the "better story" due to his lack of imagination and faith. This recalls his reflections on atheists in Chapter 7 and summarises the main theme: faith/religious belief and love make for a "better story" and provide a richer experience and understanding of life and its purpose. The chapter also foreshadows the "better story" of Pi's experiences, as well as his decision to tell a "dry, yeastless", but seemingly factually 'true', story to the sceptical Japanese investigators at the end of the novel. It begins to raise another question central to the novel: What is 'truth' and what is imagination? Is there a clear distinction between the two, or between scientific 'truth' and religious or imaginative 'truth'?

**Test yourself on Chapters 21 and 22**
1. What, according to Pi, does an agnostic miss at the moment of death?

**Chapters 23 and 24**
- Pi, now 16, is practising all three religions.
- He and his family encounter the three local religious leaders.
The imam, priest and pandit argue about which religion is best. They agree that Pi must choose one of the three religions but cannot object to Pi’s response.

The “wise men”, unlike Pi, cannot accept the commonality between the three religions, even after Pi explains himself in a simple and direct way. However, they are unable to argue with Pi’s simple truth. Pi’s parents and brother Ravi are not religious and accept the situation.

1. Where did Pi and his family meet the three local religious leaders?
2. What did the three argue about?
3. What was Pi’s reply to their insistence that he choose one religion?
4. What was his family’s response to Pi’s declaration?

Chapters 25–28
- Pi finds himself excluded from the three places of worship and finds alternative places to pray.
- Pi’s father tries to dissuade him from a Christian baptism and an Islamic prayer rug.
- Pi’s parents eventually accept his religious beliefs and rituals.

These chapters show Pi’s religion under attack. Pi speaks about the need to defend one’s own religion, and God, from the inside. Pi’s increasing isolation among people who do not understand him and his religious beliefs foreshadows his extreme isolation in Part Two. The water of Pi’s baptism symbolises God’s grace and the washing away of sin, and foreshadows Pi’s weeping for his lost innocence in Chapter 91.

1. Why was Pi excluded from the mosque, the Catholic Church and the Hindu temple?
2. How did Pi’s parents respond to his request for a prayer rug and to be baptised?

Chapters 29 and 30
- In the mid-1970s Pi’s father decides to leave India with the family and settle in Canada.
- In the present, the ‘author’ meets Pi’s Canadian-Indian wife. The ‘author’ only now realises that he has missed the signs that Pi is not alone.

1. Why did Pi’s father decide to leave India?
2. Why had the ‘author’ not noticed signs in the house that Pi was married?

Chapters 31 and 32
- Both Mr Kumars visit the zoo.
- The two men marvel at the order and beauty of nature.
Pi illustrates zoomorphism for them by referring to several examples including those mentioned in Chapters 13 and 14 of the lion tamer. Zoomorphism is when an animal treats a human or another animal as one of its own species.

Both Kumars view the animals with a sense of wonder, one from the point of view of a scientist/atheist and the other as a Muslim Sufi. Pi’s detailed knowledge of zoomorphism again adds to the believability of the story in Part Two. He is himself to experience being part of a zoo.

Answers on page 49

Test yourself on Chapters 31 and 32

1. Why does Mr Kumar the Sufi quote from the Qur’an when seeing the animals in the zoo?
2. What do the different responses of the two men to the zebra indicate about their different world views?

Chapter 33

The ‘author’ is puzzled by the absence of photographs of Pi as a child in Pondicherry.

Pi cannot remember his mother as he has no photograph of her.

Pi’s mention of Richard Parker being part of Pi’s family memorabilia (objects, such as family photographs, which are associated with important events) indicates the role animals play in Pi’s identity and his concept of family. In Part Two (Chapter 37) he refers to the animals on the ship as his “extended family”.

Answers on page 49

Test yourself on Chapter 33

1. What does the absence of a photograph of Pi’s mother suggest?

Chapters 34 and 35

Pi’s father sells the animals to zoos in North America.

It takes over a year to prepare to leave.

Pi’s family departs for Canada on the Japanese freighter, Tsimtsum, together with the animals in their cages.

The request for “an authentic Brahmin cow” for a children’s zoo suggests the commercialisation of animals. Pi’s father cynically fulfils this order as if the cow were a toy or a product. This contrasts with the view of the Brahmin cow as a religious symbol in India.

Answers on page 49

Test yourself on Chapters 34 and 35

1. Why does it take the Patel family a year to prepare to leave for Canada?
2. How does Pi feel as the ship sails from India?

Chapter 36

In Canada the ‘author’ is introduced to Pi’s son, his four-year-old daughter, a dog and a cat. He realises that the story has a happy ending.

Pi has finally revealed to the ‘author’ that there are other people in his life. The way Pi relates to his dog and cat reaffirms his zoomorphic view of life.

Part 2: Use summaries to revise
1. What does the ‘author’ mean by “This story has a happy ending”?

PART TWO

Chapter 37
- The Tsimtsum sinks and Pi finds himself in a lifeboat with a zebra with a broken leg.
- He sees Richard Parker and calls to him to swim to the lifeboat.
- Pi realises that he has helped a tiger aboard his lifeboat and jumps overboard.

This chapter marks the beginning of Pi’s long ordeal. Pi calls on heaven to explain his plight. His “Why me?” question echoes the Old and New Testaments: Christ on the cross and God punishing Job as a test of faith. There is also dramatic irony in his question, “What is the purpose of reason?” It is reason and “being able to shine at practicalities” that will prove crucial to Pi’s survival and ultimately make him a strong, independent person. The fact that he also addresses these questions to Richard Parker as if he is a human again suggests the lack of clear distinction between humans and animals. Pi refers to the animals which have drowned as “my extended family”.

Chapters 38 and 39
- Pi remembers the voyage before the Tsimtsum sank.
- Three of the sailors threw Pi to safety into a lifeboat and threw a zebra after him.

Pi, as the only survivor, seems to have been saved by inexplicable forces. He does not know why he woke up or why he investigated the unusual noise, since that was something Ravi would do.

Chapters 40–42
- Pi clings to an oar tied to a lifebuoy and the lifeboat to keep a safe distance between himself and Richard Parker.
- He sees sharks in the water and climbs into the lifeboat.
- A hyena is now also on board.
- He assumes the tiger jumped or fell overboard.
- The orang-utan, Orange Juice, drifts toward the lifeboat and climbs aboard.

Part 2: Use summaries to revise
In these chapters Pi’s only concern is survival. Pi’s comparison of the sight of Orange Juice with a vision of the Virgin Mary, besides being a religious image, foreshadows his actual ‘vision’ of the Virgin Mary in Canada (mentioned to the ‘author’ in Chapter 20).

**Test yourself on Chapters 40–42**

1. How does Pi explain the presence of the hyena on the lifeboat?
2. Why is he grateful to the sailors in spite of having to share the boat with a predator?
3. Why does Orange Juice remind Pi of his mother?

**Chapters 43–48**

- During his first night on the boat Pi hears a fight between the hyena and the zebra.
- By the next morning the hyena is eating the zebra alive.
- During the second night the hyena attacks the zebra savagely.
- The next day the zebra dies, the hyena attacks Orange Juice and kills her.
- Pi sees that Richard Parker is on the lifeboat.

Pi is beginning to experience life inside a zoo himself and the dangers of not being able to maintain a safe distance between wild animals. The hyena’s savage killing and devouring of raw meat foreshadows Pi’s butchering and devouring of sea creatures, and his descent into animalism and cannibalism. Orange Juice’s actions remind Pi that the universe can provide kindness and protection when he least expects it. He anthropomorphises (sees as having human characteristics) the orang-utan who seems like a mother. Pi, seeing Orange Juice as a “simian Christ on the Cross”, suggests his seeing meaning in her suffering.

The mix-up of Richard Parker’s name suggests three important themes: Richard Parker is also in this situation (a zoo/the lifeboat) by accident, the tiger has acquired a human name, and the tiger’s original name was Thirsty, which both he and Pi will be in a literal sense from now on.

**Test yourself on Chapters 43–48**

1. Which phrase in Chapter 43 suggests a hyena is not fussy about what it eats?
2. How did Pi feel when he saw the hyena eating the zebra alive?
3. What did Pi feel when he saw that Orange Juice was seasick and why did he feel this way?
4. How did Richard Parker get his name?
Chapters 49–52
- Pi finds food and water and other emergency supplies in a locker and calculates how long the food and water are likely to last.

Pi is coming to realise, as his biology teacher Mr Kumar had advised, the importance of paying close attention to every detail and that the tiger and hyena could help his chances of survival. In comparing his suffering of desperate hunger and thirst to the suffering of Christ, Pi again sees the possibility of finding meaning in suffering.

Answers on page 50

Test yourself on Chapters 49–52
1. Why did the hyena not attack Pi at this point?
2. Why does Richard Parker not attack either the hyena or Pi?
3. Where does Pi find water?
4. What is your opinion of the way Pi consumed the water and food at this point?

Chapters 53–55
- Pi builds a raft from life jackets and oars, and ties it to the boat.
- The tiger kills the hyena and starts eating it.
- Pi decides on a plan to outlast Richard Parker.

The killing of the hyena further narrows the ecosystem. However, Pi is developing an ability to cope with his situation by combining materials from the present with lessons from the past, in this case his knowledge that animals need distance from humans to prevent their attacking. Pi's initial plans for dealing with Richard Parker are fantasies rather than realistic survival plans and soon he is again full of fear for his survival.

Answers on page 50

Test yourself on Chapters 53–55
1. Do you agree that in the long term Plan Number Six would not be likely to ensure Pi's survival? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What had Pi learned in the past that he could use to keep Richard Parker at a safe distance?

Chapters 56–58
- Pi's battle to overcome his fear and to stay alive involves using a lion tamer's strategies.
- Pi starts to make practical plans for survival.
- His plan to train Richard Parker begins with establishing territory.
- He plans to start fishing and improving his raft.
- He feels daunted by his situation and again falls into despair.

Pi's plan to keep the tiger alive is another step towards hope, courage and survival. In Chapter 55 he had surrendered to fear and despair but now manages to overcome this "dark night of the soul". Pi recognises the tiger's role in their zoomorphic existence and sees this as a divine gift. Pi's thoughts on fear mark a transition for him. Previously he was simply suffering agonisingly from all he had lost. Now, no matter how afraid he is, he is fighting back for his life. Richard Parker, from being an agent of death, becomes the reason why Pi survives. Pi
realises he is responsible for keeping himself alive. We start to realise that his knowledge of animal behaviour could help him to survive.

**Test yourself on Chapters 56–58**
1. Find two similes in Chapter 56 the writer uses to convey the effects of fear.
2. What two reasons does Pi give for deciding to tame Richard Parker?
3. Why does Pi burst into tears at the end of Chapter 58?

**Chapters 59 and 60**
- Pi marks his own territory with his urine.
- He sets up solar stills to distil fresh water from sea water and further improves his raft.
- He starts to notice the sea around him.

Pi is continuing to master his environment and is starting to be open to the beauty of his surroundings. This will sustain him emotionally and spiritually through his ordeal.

**Test yourself on Chapters 59 and 60**
1. What does Pi do with the solar stills?
2. How and why does Pi now find “a measure of calm”?

**Chapters 61–65**
- Pi fishes using part of a flying fish as bait.
- He gets fresh water from his solar stills and feeds Richard Parker.
- When Pi blows his whistle, Richard Parker goes back under the tarpaulin.
- Pi establishes a regular routine.
- His clothes are disintegrating and he develops boils from the sea water.
- Pi tries but fails to learn how to navigate by studying the survival manual.

Just when Pi’s own skills fail him – and he fears Richard Parker will eat him – nature and/or God provide flying fish. He sees this as another divine gift, but it comes at a price: he must become a killer and give up his Hindu vegetarianism. He realises that the lifeboat is becoming more and more like a zoo: he may be taming the tiger, but is himself trapped.

Pi’s daily routine is a reminder of the two sides of his nature: a balance between the practicalities of keeping himself alive and the ritual of prayers.

The disintegration of his clothes suggests the disintegration of his spirit and his courage.

**Test yourself on Chapters 61–65**
1. How does Pi feel after killing the flying fish and what was the reason for this emotion?
2. To which biblical figure does he compare himself in killing the flying fish, and why?
3. Who is the Lord Vishnu and why does Pi offer thanks to him?
4. In what ways is Pi’s emotion different when killing the dorado to that when he killed the flying fish?
Chapters 66–69
- Pi describes his method of fishing and of killing and butchering turtles.
- Pi thinks he sees a light in the distance and sets off flares.
- He begins to despair of ever being rescued.

Pi is adapting to life as a seagoing creature. From having never killed anything, he learns to kill fish and to butcher turtles. He compares the fish scales sticking to his body to Hindu tilaks, and getting the turtles into the boat took “strength worthy of Hanuman” (the Hindu monkey god – see the Glossary for this chapter). He is again finding religious examples to give meaning to his ordeal. In the story Hanuman takes the form of a monkey, suggesting that Pi is beginning to be conscious of his developing animalism.

Test yourself on Chapters 66–69
1. Give two examples of Pi seeing himself as connected to Hindu religious symbols in Chapter 66. How do these comparisons make him feel about his situation?
2. How do Pi’s eating habits go against those of Hindu taboos and how does he feel about this?
3. Why did Pi give up hope of being rescued?

Chapters 70–72
- Pi claims and establishes shared territory.
- He learns to use turtle shells as shields against the tiger’s attacks.

Pi’s establishing his superiority as alpha male represents another milestone for him. In making himself into a tiger tamer, Pi conquers the fear which had earlier paralysed him. Another milestone is Pi gathering his strength and mastering his squeamishness to butcher a turtle.

Test yourself on Chapters 70–72
1. What happened to Pi the first time he tried to use a turtle shell as protection against Richard Parker?
2. How did Pi succeed in using this method of protecting himself?
3. What part did making the tiger seasick play in Pi establishing his dominance over the tiger?

Chapters 73–75
- Pi wishes he had a book, in particular a book of scripture, and describes keeping a diary.
- Pi tries to elevate his spirits through religious rituals and by singing “Happy Birthday” to his mother.

Pi’s wish for a holy scripture to read in order to raise his spirits and to allow him to escape from his situation reminds us of his religious nature. Having mastered some basic skills for survival, as well as the tiger, Pi now has time and energy for leisure.

Test yourself on Chapters 73–75
1. What is significant about Pi wanting to read a holy scripture at this point?
2. Pi describes the kind of things he writes in his diary “... how I felt ... All very practical stuff” (end of Chapter 73). In what ways is this statement a contradiction?
3. What religious rituals does Pi practise?

Chapters 76 and 77
- Pi uses the practice of cleaning up after Richard Parker to enforce his position as alpha male.
- He shifts from lifeboat rations to the sea as his source of food.

These chapters emphasise how desperate and how divided Pi is: he is ruler over a tiger by sheer will, yet so pathetic that he eats the animal’s faeces. This also shows his further descent into animalism and his resemblance to the hyena (which is known to eat the excrement of other animals).

Test yourself on Chapters 76 and 77
1. What did Pi do at the same time as cleaning up after Richard Parker and how did the tiger respond?

Chapters 78–81
- Pi begins catching sharks for food.
- Richard Parker injures his paw in a fight with a shark.

Pi thinks about all creatures being both interdependent and ruthless. Chapter 80 marks another victory for Pi’s mastery of the tiger. In Chapter 81 Pi explains the tiger’s seasickness in biological terms but sees it as a miraculous godsend for his survival.

Test yourself on Chapters 78–81
1. What does Pi see at this point as the reasons for his having survived so far?

Chapters 82–84
- Pi realises he has started to eat like the tiger in his rush to get his share of food.
- A powerful storm damages the raft and lifeboat; Pi finds much of the food is gone, and his leg is badly cut but that he has managed to save the whistle.
- He catches and eats birds, some of which he shares with Richard Parker.

Pi is now consciously aware of his animalism. Pi’s ability to wonder over the intelligence and beauty of the whales and dolphins shows that, despite all he has been through, he still has a religious soul. In Chapter 84 he imagines the whales being in a fable, such as one of the animal stories he used to like as a child and anthropomorphises them. Pi admits in Part One that “I quite deliberately dressed wild animals in tame costumes of my imagination. But I never deluded myself as to the real nature of my playmates” (Chapter 8). While Pi is able to view animals in a detached scientific way, he gives in from time to time to the “childish” notion of anthropomorphising them, for example the whales, Orange Juice in Chapters 46 and 47 and Richard Parker in Chapter 94. He also talks to Richard Parker as if he is a person.
1. Why does Pi add seawater to Richard Parker’s fresh water?
2. How does Pi feel when he checks the damage done by the storm?

**Chapters 85–89**
- A bolt of lightning strikes near the boat during another storm.
- Pi tries and fails to signal a passing ship.
- Later Pi uses a seawater soaked cloth which brings on an hallucinatory state.
- Pi finds a rotten lamb amongst some flotsam.
- He and Richard Parker are emaciated and he feels that they are slowly dying.

Chapters 85 and 86 show an important difference between man and beast. While Pi can see the beauty of the storm, which the tiger cannot, Richard Parker does not realise that they were not saved. For Pi, the storm is a religious experience and he feels truly happy. He feels a burst of love for the tiger, his companion in his ordeal, which is undercut by Pi’s desperate need to escape reality.

The lamb could be a religious symbol. After becoming a killer, Pi’s innocence (as a lamb) has become rotten. Pi has reached his lowest point. Up to now his ability to use words to plan, tell stories, conduct rituals and praise God has kept his spirit alive. Now that Pi is too weak to catch food, and he and the tiger are starving to death, that ability is gone, symbolising spiritual death.

**Test yourself on Chapters 85–89**
1. Quote two words or phrases from Chapter 85 which show that for Pi the lightning storm is a religious experience.
2. What kind of ship almost runs them down?
3. What are the reasons for Pi feeling such intense love for the tiger at this point?
4. What are the last words Pi writes in his diary? Why does he write these?

**Chapters 90 and 91**
- Richard Parker and Pi go blind.
- A voice answers as Pi is saying his goodbyes to Richard Parker and his family.
- It is a fellow castaway who has also gone blind from starvation.
- When the stranger tries to kill Pi, Richard Parker kills the stranger.
- Pi’s weeping restores his vision.
- He admits to using the dead man’s flesh for bait and even eating some of it.

Pi’s voyage can be read as a metaphor for a kind of hell: blind, lost souls moving through the sea with no idea who they are speaking to or where they are going, and luring innocents to their death. On a more literal level, it is a sign of the extent of Pi’s hallucinatory state that he thinks Richard Parker is talking. It also indicates how close his relationship with the tiger has become.

Although Richard Parker responds swiftly by killing and eating the other castaway and saves Pi’s life, Pi is brought to tears of mortification, sorrow and despair.

Pi realises his descent into animalism and savagery is complete and weeps for his loss of innocence, dignity and humanity. Earlier, when Pi killed a fish for the first time, he was overcome by guilt and sorrow. Now he is capable of eating human flesh. The water image reminds us of his baptism. In many religions water is associated with cleansing and redemption.

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**Part 2: Use summaries to revise**
1. Why do Pi and the tiger go blind?  
2. Who does Pi think is speaking to him and why do you think he imagines this?  
3. What is the irony of the castaway’s saying, “Come my brother let us ... feast on each other’s company”?  
4. What excuse does Pi give for his cannibalism?  

Chapter 92  
- The lifeboat washes up on the shore of an island inhabited entirely by meerkats.  
- Richard Parker feeds on the meerkats and Pi on the dead fish in fresh water ponds.  
- When Pi realises the island is carnivorous he and Richard Parker leave.  

Like Chapter 90, this chapter contains biblical and other symbols. The chapter is written in the style and language of a castaway or shipwreck story, especially those written a century or more ago, such as Robinson Crusoe. Note the use of old-fashioned words and phrases, such as “I will never know a joy so vast”, “unlimited multitude” and “A tree is a blessedly good thing to behold”. According to Pi’s survival guides and the castaway stories he knows, an island should be his salvation – an oasis, or an Eden. Instead, it is a hell, where the fruit of the ‘tree of knowledge’ (biblical symbol from Genesis) contains human teeth – the island itself devours humans. There are also echoes of Pi’s being forced to go against his Hindu religion and become a carnivore (Chapter 61) and himself eating human flesh (Chapter 91).  

Test yourself on Chapter 92  
1. Why does Pi think at first the island is a “delusion”?  
2. Is the island’s vegetation edible?  
3. What kinds of meat do Pi and Richard Parker feast on?  
4. Why does Richard Parker return each night to the boat?  
5. What does Pi discover that makes him decide to leave the island?  

Chapters 93 and 94  
- Pi passes over most of the depressing rest of his story before his arrival in Mexico.  
- He comes ashore in Mexico and Richard Parker disappears into the jungle.  
- Locals take Pi in, wash and feed him.  
- Police take him to the hospital.  

After leaving the island Pi fell into the depths of despair and his mind turned to God.  
Pi weeps, not for joy at being rescued, but because Richard Parker left him without a farewell. Pi has become so attached to Richard Parker, his companion throughout his long ordeal, that, even though he knows that animals are not like humans, he expects the tiger to act like a human, look back at him, and say goodbye. The contradiction of Richard Parker being in “the free confinement of a jungle” echoes Pi’s argument in Chapter 4 about animals in captivity being free and happy.
Test yourself on Chapters 93 and 94

1. Why does Pi say he had to “turn to God”?
2. What does Richard Parker do as soon as the lifeboat touches the Mexican shore?
3. What does Pi expect the tiger to do?
4. In Chapter 94 Pi expresses gratitude to a number of people. List these people.

PART THREE

Chapters 95-100

- Mr Okamoto and Mr Chiba arrive in Tomatlán in Mexico and interview Pi about the sinking of the Tsimshum.
- When they challenge Pi about the credibility of his story, Pi offers them a more probable story. The Chinese sailor broke a leg jumping into the lifeboat. The cook amputates the sailor’s leg to use as bait, and then when the sailor dies, butchers and eats him. Pi and his mother are shocked. Later, after a heated argument between the cook and Pi’s mother, the cook kills and beheads Pi’s mother. The next day Pi kills the cook.
- The two men note the similarities between the stories.
- They admit to Pi that, of the two stories, they like his first story better.
- Mr Okamoto’s report indicates his belief in Pi’s first story.

It is possible the reader could see the story about Pi and Richard Parker as hard to believe, but the zoological facts and scientific detail also make it believable.

The writer is suggesting that stories are important in making sense of human experience, and how many people need a story to be factual and scientifically verifiable before they can believe it. Pi’s story is “the better story” because it inspires us by showing the will of a person to survive in the face of impossible odds. It is important to note how dry and flat the second story is in comparison with the first, both in terms of the storyline and the writing style. There is no mention of the beauty of nature or of the divine. The language used in the second story is flat and lifeless in comparison to the vibrant images and descriptions of the first. Pi’s question to these men sums up the central importance of stories: while we cannot know the ultimate truth of the universe, we can be inspired by choosing “the better story”.

In the last chapter Mr Okamoto focuses on the few verifiable facts known about the sinking of the ship and sees the rest as “conjecture”, “unverifiable” and “speculation”. However, Mr Okamoto suggests to the reader that she or he should believe in Pi’s “better story”. By doing so one will believe in hope, in the human will to survive, and in God, or in a higher power. It also suggests that life is a story informed and enriched by religious belief.

Test yourself on Chapters 95–100

1. Which parts of Pi’s story do the investigators find particularly hard to believe?
2. Which characters feature in Pi’s second story?
3. Why do the investigators also find the second story improbable?
4. What does Pi mean by “the better story”?
5. Which story do the investigators decide to believe in the end and why?

Part 2: Use summaries to revise
Part 3 Analyse the novel

Personal response to the text

While your opinion is important, you are given marks for how clearly and logically you support it. For example, an examination question might ask, 'What is your opinion of Pi’s eating of human flesh in Chapter 90?' Whether you answer that it appalls you or not is not as important as the logical way in which you support your opinion.

*Example*

*Question:* Do you condemn Pi’s eating of the flesh of the castaway killed by Richard Parker?

*Answer 1:* Pi’s cannibalism is disgusting and unacceptable (opinion). Pi’s behaviour is not that of a civilised human being. He could have shown some restraint and this shows how far he has descended into animalism and savagery (support of your opinion).

*Answer 2:* I do not judge Pi at this point, and in fact sympathise with him (opinion). Pi had no choice at this stage since he was on the point of dying of starvation and had to survive. Also, he wept with shame afterwards (support of your opinion).

Diction, imagery and sound devices

Word choice (diction), imagery (often comparisons: similes, metaphors and personifications) and sound devices (alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia) are often striking features of prose writing. Writers use these to create a particular effect and contribute to the overall meaning and richness of the text.

**Similes, metaphors, personifications**

In similes two things that are unlike each other are compared with each other for the sake of effect. For example, in *Life of Pi* the author describes the tiger as having “claws like scimitars” (Chapter 99) and says his “paws were like volumes of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*” (Chapter 47). These comparisons vividly evoke how powerful and deadly the tiger’s claws and paws are. Refer also to the Glossary of literary terms on page 56 of this guide for examples of metaphors and personifications Martel uses.

Martel’s original use of language and of literary devices, particularly in his descriptions of the sea, convey in a striking and vivid way the beauty and awe-inspiring qualities of nature. For example, the lightning storm (Chapter 85) with the images of the lightning as “a great celestial tree” and “a gigantic, blinding white shard of glass”.

**Sound devices**

Examples of alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia Martel uses in his descriptions can be found in the Glossary of literary terms at the end of this guide.

Martel uses alliteration in Pi’s description of the fish he catches: “sleek slippery design of fish” (Chapter 45); guts have slithered away like a snake (Chapter 56). These emphasise the slippery texture of the skin of the fish.
Martel's style of writing

Martel's style is often a mixture of seemingly casual conversational language, such as his lectures on animal behaviour or the practical details of his daily survival, and descriptions of moments of intense beauty, which can also be unsettling:

- Killing it was no problem. I would have spared myself the trouble – after all, it was for Richard Parker and he would have dispatched it with expert ease – but for the hook that was imbedded in its mouth. I exulted at having a dorado at the end of my line – I would be less keen if it were a tiger. I went about the job in a direct way. I took the hatchet in both my hands and vigorously beat the fish on the head with the hammerhead (I still didn’t have the stomach to use the sharp edge). The dorado did the most extraordinary thing as it died: it began to flash all kinds of colours in rapid succession. Blue, green, red, gold and violet flickered and shimmered neon-like on the surface as it struggled. I felt I was beating a rainbow to death.

Symbolism and imagery

Religious imagery and symbolism

Religious images and symbols are scattered throughout the novel, linked of course to the religious theme.

Orange Juice is described as the Virgin Mary, suggesting not only maternal, protective qualities but also innocence (Chapter 42). She is also described as “a simian Christ on a cross”, comparing her suffering and death to that of Christ and giving it religious significance for Pi (Chapter 47).

Pi compares the fish scales smeared on his body to Hindu tilaks: “the marks of colour that we Hindus wear on our foreheads as symbols of the divine” (Chapter 66).

Darkness and light are also symbols related to religion. Darkness is associated with and symbolises hell. During his ordeal Pi suffers emotionally/spiritually dark and despairing times like the mystics (for example, St. John of the Cross’s Dark Night of the Soul). These occur during both the night and the day. Light often indicates for Pi a renewal of both hope and religious faith. In Chapter 74 Pi describes these states of despair and hope: “God’s ear didn’t seem to be listening…”

Mr Kumar, Pi’s biology teacher, sees religion as darkness – in the sense of ignorance, obscuring the truth – scientific truth, which he associates with light.

Symbolism of Pi’s name

Piscine’s nickname, Pi, has a symbolic relationship with the mathematical symbol π which is pronounced as ‘pi’. Pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. Mathematical relationships are calculated and explained logically and rationally by the irrational number π. Although some unbelievable experiences and irrational events are explained logically and rationally by Pi, neither Pi nor π can be confined by logic or taken to a coherent end point.

Martel said that he chose the name Pi because it is an irrational number which scientists use to come to a “rational” understanding of the universe, in the same way that religion is something beyond the reasonable that helps us makes sense of things.
Symbolism of the algae island
The island seems at first to symbolise a Garden of Eden or the haven a castaway reaches after days of drifting at sea. There is a terrible irony in this: when Pi discovers the “forbidden fruit” on the twisted branches of the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” his illusion is shattered and he has to leave. There is a kind of heaven and hell associated with day and night. By day the meerkats eat without having to kill and show no fear, even of Richard Parker. At night, the island becomes carnivorous and the ecosystem feeds on itself (see the summary of Chapter 92).

Symbolism of the Tsimtsum
The name of the ship comes from the Kabbalist (Kabbalah is an ancient wisdom that reveals how the universe and life work) concept of ‘tsimtsum’, where God withdraws himself to make room for the creation of the universe. The sinking of the ship may symbolise God withdrawing from Pi to make room for Pi to develop as a physically and emotionally strong and independent creature.

‘Tsimtsum’ is necessary for creatures that are to become independent so they can freely choose a relationship with God.

Symbolism of the colour orange
Orange is the colour of survival and faith. The whistles, life jacket, lifebuoy and tarpaulin are orange, and Richard Parker is described as having orange and black stripes. It is also the colour of the second Hindu chakra (the spiritual energy centre of the body).

Symbolism of the animals (linked to the novel as fable)
The animals in Pi’s lifeboat could, as in fables, symbolise or represent human traits: brutality, the will to dominate, helplessness, courage and love.

They could also represent aspects of Pi himself, what he was or became at stages in his ordeal:

- The hyena: Pi’s brutal, animalistic side that emerged during his ordeal. That part of him that was willing to do whatever it took to survive, even eat faeces.
- The zebra: Pi as helpless victim at the beginning of his ordeal, the one that lies down and dies and has no defences. For Pi, in his desperate situation, it would have been easier – he was on occasion tempted – to lie there and let fate dictate his circumstances. It is the side of Pi that felt sorry for himself and his situation and blamed it on the unfairness of life.
- The orang-utan: the compassionate, loving, protective side of Pi, and his longing for his family and mother. Orange Juice made him feel homesick for his mother and also gave him some comfort during the first part of his ordeal. However, this part of him did not help him to survive in the end. It was too soft, too inefficient, too impractical and squeamish.
- Richard Parker: the blend of those sides of Pi’s personality that are the most efficient and logical for survival. Richard Parker first represents a strong, alpha character that could dominate any situation, but not with the senseless brutality that the hyena represents. Richard Parker seems to suffer with dignity and represents the part of Pi that wants to live, and that finds the courage to do things he has never done before. Pi’s expressing love for Richard Parker in Chapter 86 could be seen as his love for this part of himself.
Finally, the animals could also symbolise or represent the people in Pi’s second, more credible story:

- The hyena (the French cook): cowardliness and savagery, but also the negative characteristics of a tiger: ruthlessness and predatoriness
- The orang-utan (Pi’s mother): maternal, protective instincts
- The zebra: helplessness/powerlessness
- The tiger: Pi, and/or the apparent contradictions of animal nature (savagery together with power and beauty).

**Structure: Plot, conflict and climax**

**Structure of a plot**

Stories and novels are structured in roughly the same way. Understanding how a work is put together can help us to understand the writer’s purpose. The basic structure of most works of fiction consists of three parts, namely an introductory section, the main body and the conclusion.

When studying literature we use different words to describe and analyse these structural features. In the diagram below the straight line shows the usual basic shape of a story or novel. The plots of some novels, including *Life of Pi*, follow a variation of this basic structure.

![Basic structure of a plot](image)

The early part of the novel (the exposition) introduces the setting and characters. It also introduces the conflict (or conflicts) on which the plot will turn. These conflicts are developed until the climax (high point in the action) is reached, after which the plot is drawn to a close and loose ends are tied up. This last section is the denouement. The events leading up to the climax are described as rising action, while events after the climax represent falling action.

*Life of Pi* has two conflicts that drive the plot.

**Conflicts in Life of Pi**

There are two main conflicts, the external conflict, visible on the surface, and Pi’s internal conflict.
On the surface, there seem to be two the antagonists in Pi’s conflict: Richard Parker and Nature.

- Pi’s hardships at sea begin with the threat presented by the tiger.
- These progress to surviving both starvation and the elements.

However, the real conflict – the one the writer is interested in – is Pi’s internal struggle.

- Pi struggles:
  - to maintain his faith, but he must compromise his beliefs in order to live. For example, he includes prayer in his daily routine at sea, but he must kill, and forego his Hindu vegetarianism to stay alive.
  - to reconcile his animal instincts/descent into animalism with his humanity/human dignity.
  - between his desire to give up (despair) and his will to survive.
  - to reconcile what is scientifically verifiable and what is “the better story”.

**Climax**

There are two climaxes in the plot or story line of *Life of Pi*:

1. The sinking of the ship.
2. Pi and Richard Parker reaching Mexico and Pi and the investigators choosing the “better story”.

Most of Part One prepares the reader for what happens to Pi after the first climax, ‘how he manages to survive against overwhelming odds’.

The second climax occurs when Pi and Richard Parker reach Mexico but we could argue that the story and its ending (denouement) are not finally resolved for Pi, the investigators, or for the reader.

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![Plot structure and outline](image-url)

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**Part 3: Analyse the novel**
The following diagram shows how Part One prepares us for Part Two in terms of making Part Two believable. Part Two prepares us for accepting Part Three, the “better (more inspiring) story”.

Part One
- **Breaks down the reader’s disbelief in the story in Part Two: “a story that could make you believe in God”, and introduces conflict:**
  a) Pi learning about animals and religion as a child
  b) glimpses of the deeply religious adult Pi
  c) conflict between religion and science.

Part Two
- **The last-at-sea ordeal story that could make us “believe in God”:**
  a) factual details about the practicalities of staying alive
  b) magical descriptions of nature showing *one must have faith in more than logic and reason*
  c) Pi surviving against tremendous odds and with the help of ‘divine’ gifts from nature/God
  d) conflict between despair and hope/religious faith.

Part Three
- **Believe “the better story”:**
  a) It is not possible to scientifically prove either of Pi’s stories to be true.
  b) The reader must choose: the more believable “dry, yeastless factuality” story or a richer and more inspiring story: the “better story”.

Answers on page 52

**Test yourself on the plot**

1. Copy the *Life of Pi* plot structure diagram on page 26 onto an A3 sheet of paper. Drawing on your knowledge of the plot and timeline of events, write in other important events in their correct places.
2. Think about the structure of the plot in terms of its parts (exposition, development of conflicts, two climaxes and denouement).
   a) The exposition of the novel sets the scene by describing the setting (where the action takes place), the time, the main characters and the conflict or conflicts on which the plot turns. In the case of *Life of Pi*, which chapter or chapters would you describe as the exposition?
   b) Pi’s conflict between science and religion develops during Part One. How does he manage to resolve this in Part One?
   c) The conflict between Pi’s despair and his religious faith begins to develop in, and intensifies throughout, Part Two. Where, or in which chapter, do you think this conflict reaches a climax? Why do you think so?
   d) In the last part of a story (the denouement), the writer usually draws events to a close, ties up loose ends and/or resolves the conflicts. Some readers feel that *Life of Pi* does not really have a final denouement. Would you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
Characters

Characters in a novel are crucial to the development of the conflicts through their actions. Some characters are main characters, for example, Pi and Richard Parker. In *Life of Pi* the plot develops around these two characters. Some are minor characters, for example members of Pi’s family, the religious leaders, the animals and the Japanese investigators.

Major characters

**Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)**
- He is the main protagonist, the chief narrator.
- *Piscine*, comes from the French word for swimming pool; it also means ‘fish-like’ in English.
- He is intelligent, full of curiosity, deeply religious and searching for a connection to God/meaning in life by exploring and practising Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.
- From childhood Pi gathers knowledge about the habits and characteristics of animals and people. This turns out to be crucial to his survival.
- Pi’s character develops in the course of the novel, particularly in Part Two.

**Richard Parker**
- He is a Royal Bengal tiger weighing 450 pounds (204 kg) and measuring 9 feet (2.8 m) long.
- The tiger’s captor, Richard Parker, named him Thirsty, but a shipping clerk reversed their names in error.
- Pi shares the lifeboat with the tiger for the duration of his ordeal.
- The tiger kills the hyena on the lifeboat and later the blind cannibal.
- Pi trains Richard Parker to respect Pi’s alpha male dominance, thus enabling them to co-exist on the lifeboat.
- Pi describes the tiger’s god-like beauty, symmetry and power.
- For Pi, the tiger is his companion during his ordeal and the reason for staying alive.
Minor characters

The author
- This is the fictitious narrator of the Author’s note.
- He inserts himself into the narrative at several points throughout the novel.
- He never identifies himself by name, but there are several clues suggesting that he is Yann Martel himself, thinly disguised (see the analysis of the Author’s note in the Chapter by chapter summaries section of this study guide).
- The fictitious author provides an additional point of view in the story, gradually revealing the character of Pi through his descriptions of the adult Pi in Canada.

Francis Adirubasamy
- He is the kind elderly man who tells the ‘author’ Pi’s story during a chance meeting in a Pondicherry coffee shop.
- He arranges for the ‘author’ to meet Pi in person to get a first-hand account of Pi’s story.
- He is a friend of the Patel family.
- He taught Pi to swim as a child and gave him the name Piscine.

Ravi
- He is Pi’s older brother.
- He is physically strong, popular, prefers sports, especially cricket to schoolwork, reading, or thinking about religion and God.
- He teases his younger brother mercilessly over his devotion to three religions.

Santosh Patel
- He is Pi’s father and owner of Pondicherry Zoo.
- He once owned a hotel.
- He has a natural interest in, and skill with, animals.
- He teaches his sons to fear wild animals.
- Though raised a Hindu, he is not religious and is puzzled by Pi’s adoption of numerous religions.
- The political situation in India makes him decide to move his family to Canada.

Gita Patel
- She is Pi’s loving, sensitive and protective mother.
- She is a book lover and encourages Pi to read widely.
- She was raised Hindu with a Baptist education but she does not subscribe to any religion.
- Pi inserts her into his second story in place of Orange Juice.

Satish Kumar
- He is Pi’s biology teacher.
- A polio survivor, he is an odd-looking man with a geometric-shaped body.
- An atheist and a communist, he is logical and scientific. He has faith, or believes in the views of Mendel (father of genetics) and Darwin (natural selection).
- Pi is able to accept Mr Kumar’s atheism because, although Kumar does not believe in God, he still believes and takes the “leap of faith” that reason leads him to.
Father Martin
- He is the Catholic priest who introduces Pi to Christianity.
- He inspires Pi to become a Christian.

Satish Kumar 2
- He is a baker and a Muslim mystic with the same name as Pi’s biology teacher.
- He is deeply religious in a quiet and humble way.
- He inspires Pi to become a follower of Islam.

The Hindu pandit
- He is a Hindu priest.
- He is outraged when Pi, who was raised Hindu, begins practising other religions.
- He and the other two religious leaders unwillingly accept Pi’s declaration that he just wants to “love God”.

Meena Patel
- Pi’s Indian-Canadian wife

Nikhil Patel (Nick)
- Pi’s son

Usha Patel
- Pi’s daughter

The hyena
- A very ugly, violent and savage animal that ends up on the lifeboat with Pi.
- He eats the zebra alive and kills and eats Orange Juice.
- He is killed and eaten by Richard Parker.
The zebra
- A male Grant's zebra.
- He breaks his leg jumping into the lifeboat.
- The hyena torments him and eats him alive.

Orange Juice
- The orang-utan that appears on the first day floating on a raft of bananas.
- Pi sees her as maternal and suffering humanlike bouts of loneliness and seasickness. (He anthropomorphises her.)
- The hyena brutally attacks and kills her.

The blind Frenchman
- A fellow castaway, who is blinded by starvation.
- Pi comes across him by chance in the middle of the ocean.
- He tries to kill and cannibalise Pi before Richard Parker kills him.

Tomohiro Okamoto
- An official from the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport who is investigating the sinking of the Japanese Tsukishima.
- Together with his assistant, he interviews Pi and is sceptical of Pi’s first account of his ordeal.

Atsuro Chiba
- He is Okamoto’s assistant.
- He is the more naive and trusting of the two Japanese officials.
- Chiba agrees with Pi that the version of his ordeal with animals is the better story.

The French cook
- He is the human counterpart to the hyena in Pi’s second story.
- He is the rude, violent and cannibalistic alpha male.
- After he kills the sailor and Pi’s mother, Pi stabs him and he dies.
The Chinese sailor
- He is the human counterpart to the zebra in Pi's second story.
- Like the zebra, he broke his leg jumping off the ship, and it became infected.
- The cook cuts off the leg, and, like the zebra, the sailor dies slowly.

Test yourself on the characters
1. Choose adjectives and/or phrases from this list to describe Pi, Pi's mother, Pi's father and Pi's brother, Ravi:
   - loving, sporty, curious, intelligent, not religious, natural instinct for zoo keeping, protective, interest in animal behaviour, mocking, deeply religious

2. What are the main differences between the two Mr Kumars?
4. If one reads Life of Pi as a fable, what human traits could the various animals which feature in Part Two be said to represent?
5. Which two animal characters does Pi anthropomorphise in Part Two and why?

The role of the narrator: Narrative voice
This is related to point of view. Most of the novel is narrated by Pi in the first person. As an adult living in Canada, he tells his story to the 'author'. In Part One several chapters are interspersed with Pi's story and are narrated by the 'author', in the first person, about his visits to Pi in his home in Canada. In Part Two Pi narrates the story of his experiences on the lifeboat at the age of 16 from his own point of view.

Through this narrative device, we are given glimpses of Pi the man by the 'author', while the story told by Pi is the story of Pi the 16 year-old boy, as the adult Pi remembers it. Through the point of view of the 'author', we gather hints of how Pi as an adult has been changed by his experience.

Chapter 99 consists entirely of the direct speech of Pi and the Japanese investigators. We are listening to the interview: the various voices allow us to hear Pi in the course of trying to convince the investigators of the truth of his story. By including the thoughts and words of the Japanese investigator, we are given a sceptical point of view, perhaps one that we as readers may have acquired by this stage in the novel. We are given an opportunity to imagine that Pi's story is perhaps not entirely believable.

All of these various voices allow us to delve deeper into the stories and into the character of Pi, providing insights into how he survived his ordeal and how it changed him and strengthened his religious faith.

Test yourself: Who is the author of the novel?
1. Is Yann Martel the author of the Author's note and of those chapters describing the author's visits to the adult Pi in Canada? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Do the interruptions by the 'author' of Pi's narrative serve any purpose in the novel? If so, what purpose do they serve?
3. How old is Pi when he tells the ‘author’ his story and how old is Pi at the time of his ordeal on the lifeboat?
4. Do you think Pi’s “lectures” on animal behaviour and psychology interrupt the story? What, if any purpose do these lectures serve in the novel?
5. Why do you think Martel wrote Chapter 99 in the form of a transcription of an interview? What, if anything, do you think it adds to the novel?

**Themes**

*Life of Pi*, while appearing to be an adventure story or a castaway or shipwreck story, raises several important issues or themes.

The main theme is that of the “better story” and how the better story can inspire us and help us understand the world.

**Life is a story/the “better story”**

*Life of Pi*, according to Yann Martel, can be summarised in three statements: “Life is a story ... You can choose your story ... A story with God is the better story.”

A recurring theme throughout the novel is that of life as a story. This raises the questions, ‘What is truth and what is fiction?’ ‘Are there different kinds of “truth”?’ Pi, at the end of the novel, asks the two investigators, “If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for?”

This raises the question as to whether religion and a religious view of the world makes life a “better story”. We are asked to judge which is the better of the two stories Pi tells to the investigators, the hard-to-believe mysterious, inspirational story offering hope, or the flat (“yeastless”) more believable story.

Martel is suggesting how religion, or fiction, in the form of an inspirational and barely credible story such as Pi’s, often tells a richer story than a factual/verifiable account does. There is no such thing as a single true story but the richer story, although it may not line up with the factual events, says something about our humanness in a way that straight facts never could. Throughout his ordeal Pi calls on stories from all three of his religions to give meaning to his suffering and to provide him with hope.

**The relationship between reason/science and religion**

Throughout the novel science and religion, two seemingly opposite areas of study and world views, intermingle and complement each other. In Part One the two Mr Kumars, although the two are indistinguishable in name, represent these two apparently opposing views, and they come together and both marvel at the zebra in the zoo. Pi comes to realise that their views are complementary views, or faiths. “Mr. and Mr. Kumar were the prophets of my Indian youth.” (Chapter 20)

Pi’s knowledge of science and his religious faith combine to effect his survival in Part Two. Remembering his biology teacher’s advice to pay close attention to every detail, he uses empirical observation – of Richard Parker and of marine life – to help him to survive. The adult Pi ends up with a degree in both zoology and religious studies, and does not make a sharp distinction between the two.

Pi’s ability to see religious meaning in his desperate experiences, and the love he develops for Richard Parker, also sustain and provide him with hope through his ordeal.

The theme of the reconciliation of science and religion as equally valid ways to understand the world is also related to the mathematical concept of pi – using the irrational to explain the rational.

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**Part 3: Analyse the novel**
All religions are essentially the same
During his childhood and early adolescence Pi starts to discover the central belief of all three religions he explores and practises: love. His faith is severely tested during his ordeal, but in the end his survival against tremendous odds, and the gratitude and love he develops for Richard Parker, serve to strengthen his religious faith and his desire to practise all three of the religions. This is evident from the ‘author’s’ description of the adult Pi’s house in Chapter 15.

True religion does not depend on dogma or public display
Pi’s way of finding God – a universal God – is not confined by dogma or the need for the correct public display. Mr Kumar 2 is a humble man; his prayer rituals are not showy or self-conscious. Pi practises his religious rituals in the confines of the boat throughout his journey. He is interested in faith rather than organised religion.

Growth through adversity/coming of age
Martel’s story has been described as one of “personal growth through adversity,” and as ‘a coming of age story’. His ordeal adrift in the ocean tests his physical and emotional strength, his intelligence, and his religious faith to the limits.

Pi is 16 years of age at the time of his ordeal. He learns that “tigers are dangerous” at a young age when his father forces him to watch a tiger devour a live goat. He also knows about the theory of lion taming. Later, after he is reduced to despair and to trying to stay alive on the lifeboat with the company of a fully grown tiger, Pi draws on his knowledge of animal behaviour and lion taming strategies to tame Richard Parker. In the process he develops alpha qualities as he musters the strength, confidence and the will to survive. He also uses his ingenuity and previous scientific knowledge to develop the practical skills he needs to survive. In this process he develops and grows stronger emotionally: he overcomes fear and despair, and develops spiritually, finding a deep love for the tiger, for the beauty of nature and as well as a strengthening of his religious faith. Our glimpses of the adult Pi in Canada through the eyes of the ‘author’ confirm that this is the case.

Animals and humans share many characteristics
Pi realises how alike in many ways animals and humans are: we are all animals with good and bad qualities, and we are all interdependent. Pi’s knowledge of animal behaviour in a zoo makes him realise that on the lifeboat he is part of a zoo and has to deal with it using his knowledge. Although he knows about anthropomorphism (treating animals as if they were human), and is able to view animals in a detached scientific way, he finds himself anthropomorphising both Orange Juice and Richard Parker. Pi admits in Chapter 8: “I quite frequently dressed wild animals in the tame costumes of imagination”.

The paradoxes of creation/nature: its beauty and cruelty
During his ordeal Pi experiences the ruthlessness of the elements, being battered by storms, burned by the sun and threatened by both the tiger and various sea creatures.

However, there are lyrical passages throughout Part Two which celebrate the beauty of nature and of animals and arouse wonder in Pi – the description of the tiger (Chapter 53) as a god-like creature of incredible beauty and power;
descriptions of the weather – the lightning storm (Chapter 85) which aroused feelings of ecstasy in Pi; descriptions of the ocean, from both above and below (Chapter 59).

Test yourself on the themes of the novel

1. Write a paragraph of 10–12 lines in which you compare the two stories Pi tells to the Japanese investigators. In what ways could the second story be described in terms of “dry yeastless factuality” and how does this relate to Pi’s question “If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for?”

2. In Chapter 31 each of the Mr Kumars expresses his response to the zebra in the zoo. In each case, write down the words uttered by each man which sum up their respective ways of seeing the world. How do these two responses reflect a central theme of the novel? (Refer to the Glossary for Chapters 31 and 32 at the end of this study guide).

3. Mention one example of a story from Pi’s Hindu religion, and one from his Christian religion, which he recalls during his ordeal in order to give meaning to his suffering and to inspire him to persevere.

Setting

While the events of the story take place in several settings (Canada, Pondicherry Zoo, the Pacific Ocean, a carnivorous island and Mexico), most of the action takes place on a lifeboat adrift in the Pacific Ocean. This is in line with the theme of Life of Pi being Pi’s journey – a spiritual and emotional as well as a physical journey – during which he grows and develops into adulthood.

There is also a paradox to do with the spaces of the settings, both in physical and emotional terms. While the first part of the novel is set in the freedom and open spaces of the Pondicherry gardens and zoo, the settings become increasingly narrow. The worsening political situation in India feels confining to the Patel family who leave. The lifeboat in which Pi finds himself with a man-eating tiger is claustrophobic in the extreme. However, the small lifeboat is adrift on a vast ocean, and the experiences and actions of Pi on that lifeboat, his dedication to keeping Richard Parker alive, his religious rituals and his observations of nature, bring him spiritual insights and experiences of wonder.

The relationship with a dangerous animal turns out to be one of true friendship. Thus, ironically one could see Pi as finding an emotional and spiritual freedom while confined in a lifeboat.

Analyse a key scene

The annotated scene on page 36 comes at a key point in the novel – after the night of a violent storm during which Pi had begun to make plans for surviving in the lifeboat without being attacked by Richard Parker. This moment is analysed in terms of the issues discussed in this section of the study guide. The text has been annotated to show how an analysis of a scene would draw attention to various key elements and make sense of it in terms of the main themes of the novel.

You can use this analysis as an example when you attempt your own analysis and annotation of other key scenes and to prepare for contextual questions.
This raft was a joke. It was nothing but a few sticks and a little cork held together by string. Water came through every crack. The depth beneath would make a bird dizzy. I caught sight of the lifeboat. It was no better than half a walnut shell. It held on to the surface of the water like fingers gripping the edge of a cliff. It was only a matter of time before gravity pulled it down.

My fellow castaway came into view. He raised himself onto the gunwale and looked my way. The sudden appearance of a tiger is arresting in any environment, but it was all the more so here. The weird contrast between the bright, striped, living orange of his coat and the inert white of the boat’s hull was incredibly compelling. My overwrought senses screeched to a halt. Vast as the Pacific was around us, suddenly, between us, it seemed a very narrow moat, with no bars or walls. “Plan Number Six, Plan Number Six, Plan Number Six,” my mind whispered urgently. But what was Plan Number Six? Ah yes. The war of attrition. The waiting game. Passivity. Letting things happen. The unforgiving laws of nature. The relentless march of time and the hoarding of resources. That was Plan Number Six.

A thought rang in my mind like an angry shout: “You fool and idiot! You daft! You brainless baboon! Plan Number Six is the worst plan of all! Richard Parker is afraid of the sea right now. It was nearly his grave. But crazed with thirst and hunger he will surmount his fear, and he will do whatever is necessary to appease his need. He will turn this moat into a bridge. He will swim as far as he has to, to catch the drifting raft and the food upon it. As for water, have you forgotten that tigers from the Sundarbans are known to drink saline water? Do you really think you can outlast his kidneys? I tell you, if you wage a war of attrition, you will lose it! You will die! IS THAT CLEAR?”

(Chapter 55)

This is a key moment in PI’s battle for survival. PI is now drawing on his knowledge to help him see clearly the interdependence of boy and animal in the lifeboat ecosystem. Based on this, he will come up with a realistic strategy to keep the tiger alive and for them to coexist within the confined space of the lifeboat. We can start to believe in the likelihood of his and Richard Parker’s survival.

Earlier PI described the tiger as a kind of god, a powerful and beautiful animal. What words convey his magnetic energy? The colour orange is important in the Hindu religion. There are many symbols of religien throughout the novel, reminding us of PI’s search for God.

One of six plans PI had hatched the night before to survive an attack from Richard Parker.

He had on a few occasions been tempted to do this — like the zebra who was helpless against the hyena.

PI recalls some of the considerable knowledge of animal behaviour he displayed in Part One. He is about to use this to prevent the tiger from attacking him.

Again, his perception of the likely behaviour of Richard Parker is based on his knowledge of tigers living in a mangrove coastal region.
The structure of the English Paper 2

*Life of Pi* will be examined in the Literature paper (Paper 2) of your final Grade 12 Home Language exam.

You will be given a choice between answering a contextual and an essay question. Both are worth 25 marks.

**Compare contextual and essay questions**

In a contextual question, you are given an extract or extracts from the text with several questions that test your understanding and knowledge of the specific passage or the novel as a whole. Your response takes the form of several short answers. The length of an answer depends on the mark allocation for the question (see the sample contextual questions on page 39 of this study guide).

To do well at a contextual question, you need to:
- know the text very well
- grasp the essence of what a question requires you to do
- know how to quote evidence from the printed text to substantiate or justify your answer
- give only what is asked for (any additional or irrelevant information can pull down your marks).

In an essay question, you are usually asked to defend or discuss a broad statement about the themes or characters in the work.

Your answer usually needs to be between 400 and 450 words. To write a good essay, you need to:
- state a point of view or argument clearly
- develop your argument through a series of stages to a point that concludes the essay
- draw on and refer to the text itself, either through quotation or reference to key scenes and events.
(See Tips on answering essay questions on page 44 and and sample essay questions on page 46 of this study guide.)

The paper is set in such a way that you have to answer one contextual question and one essay question. If you choose to answer the contextual question in Section B (the novel), for example, you will have to answer the essay question in Section C (the drama).

**Contextual questions**

**Tips on answering contextual questions**

Allow approximately 45 minutes to answer a contextual question. This question will comprise sub-questions of between one and five marks per question.

Here are some tips for answering contextual questions:
1. Read the passage. Ask yourself what happened before and after the passage.
2. Take note of which characters are involved in the passage.
3. Skim through the questions. This will also help you contextualise the passage.
4. Remember the golden rule to take note of the mark allocation and be guided by this:
   - 1 mark question: answer briefly usually with a word or phrase
   - 2 mark question: one point or idea, briefly substantiated
   - 3 mark question: give more detail when substantiating or explaining your answer
   - 4 mark question: make two separate points or ideas and substantiate these, or give an opinion, and substantiate with three points, depending on what the question requires
   - more than 4 marks: usually write a paragraph.
5. Substantiate your answer with evidence from the passage or novel.
6. Answer in your own words, unless you are asked to quote.
7. Use quotation marks when you quote from the text.
8. Remember that the clear and grammatical way in which you express your answer counts.
9. Make sure you analyse each question and that your answer focuses only on what the question asks. For example, if you are asked to explain how certain words in the passage encapsulate Pi's struggle to survive at this point in the novel, do not refer to or give another separate point. For example, if you are asked how Pi's knowledge of animal behaviour helped him to survive, do not refer to how he managed to convert seawater to fresh water.
10. Be clear about what the following words used in questions mean and what they require you to do:
    - account for: give reasons for, explain why something happens, or someone behaves in the way they do
    - allusions, allude to: refer to; mention (this does not require a full re-telling)
    - appropriateness: comment on aptness or suitability (usually a writer's use of a figure of speech or other device)
    - assess: weigh up the various sides and make a judgement
    - atmosphere: look for words describing the dominant mood as created by setting, dialogue and so on
    - attitude: use the right sort of word to describe a character's attitude to others
    - character: use appropriate words in describing character; if required, give evidence referring to what the character says, what he or she does and what other characters say about him or her
    - comment on: try to assess from the marks allocated the amount of comment expected
    - compare: look for similarities and differences
    - context: if you are asked the context of a quotation, state who the speaker is, to whom the words were spoken and why
    - contrast: point out only the dissimilar aspects
    - criticism: does not mean saying bad things about the work; it is judging, evaluating, appreciating and assessing
    - deduce: draw a conclusion
    - describe: give a description or full account of
    - discuss: examine, give reasons for and against, make an assessment of strengths and values
    - emphasis: there are many ways a writer can produce emphasis, for example, through repetition, using short sentences, altering word order, climax and isolating a word in a short line
evaluate: give a discussion of and draw a conclusion as to the value of something
explain: avoid merely repeating what you are asked to explain
identify: point out something, usually a person or place, but also a figurative device or tone
illustrate: give clear examples
imply: the writer or speaker hints at or suggests, and the reader is left to infer a meaning
interpret: give the meaning and your own judgement
justify: show that something is what it claims to be; give adequate reasons and references for your opinion or points you make
narrate: tell the story, recount, describe what happened
outline: give the major points of a story or argument
plot: structure of the actions of a story or play; if asked to discuss plot, avoid merely re-telling the story: comment on the way particular events give rise to others
point: the essential idea, concept or fact
reasons: if asked to give reasons, be guided by the marks allocated to the question
role: if asked to discuss the role of a character, deal in outline with what they do, but concentrate more on their function and purpose within the structure of the work
satire: if asked to explain satire in a work, give the target of the attack (in other words, the person or idea), the particular feature being singled out (for example, self-importance) and the method of satire being used (for example, irony, sarcasm, innuendo, hyperbole or understatement), for example the religious leaders arguing about religion in Chapter 23 are represented as self-important
your own opinion: express your own reaction or view, making sure that you always substantiate or give evidence to support your opinion.

Sample contextual questions

Contextual question 1
Read the following extracts from Life of Pi and answer the questions that follow them. Remember to answer in your own words, except when quoting.

1.1 Extract A

"Religion will save us," I said. Since when I could remember, religion had been very close to my heart.

"Religion?" Mr. Kumar grinned broadly. "I don't believe in religion. Religion is darkness."

Darkness? I was puzzled. I thought, Darkness is the last thing that religion is. Religion is light. Was he testing me? Was he saying, "Religion is darkness," the way he sometimes said in class things like "Mammals lay eggs," to see if someone would correct him? ("Only platypuses, sir").

"There are no grounds for going beyond a scientific explanation of reality and no sound reason for believing anything but our sense experience. A clear intellect, close attention to detail and a little scientific knowledge will expose religion as superstitious bosh. God does not exist."

Did he say that? Or am I remembering the lines of later atheists? At any rate, it was something of the sort. I had never heard such words.
"Why tolerate darkness? Everything is here and clear, if only we look carefully."

He was pointing at Peak. Now though I had great admiration for Peak, I had never thought of a rhinoceros as a light bulb.

He spoke again. "Some people say God died during the Partition in 1947. He may have died in 1971 during the war. Or he may have died yesterday here in Pondicherry in an orphanage. That’s what some people say. Pi. When I was your age, I lived in bed, racked with polio. I asked myself every day, 'Where is God? Where is God? Where is God? God never came. It wasn’t God who saved me— it was medicine. Reason is my prophet and it tells me that as a watch stops, so we die. It’s the end."

Source: *Life of Pi*, Chapter 7

1.1.1 Where are Pi and Mr Kumar when they have this discussion?

1.1.2 "Religion is darkness."

   a) Why does Mr Kumar equate religion with "darkness" and what would he equate with light?

   b) In what specific way does his view differ from Pi’s?

1.1.3 The last paragraph (lines 15–20) indicates that Mr Kumar is:

   A  An agnostic
   B  An atheist
   C  A Christian

   Give a reason for your answer.

1.1.4 "A clear intellect, close attention to detail and a little scientific knowledge" (lines 8–9)

   a) How did these three things help Pi to survive his ordeal later in the novel?

   b) Did Pi’s ordeal convince him in the end that “God does not exist”? Justify your answer.

1.1.5 In what way did Pi experience ‘darkness’ during his ordeal, besides the physical darkness of his nights?

1.2 Extract B

Still, it pleased me that this pious baker, as plain as a shadow and of solid health, and the Communist biology teacher and science devotee, the walking mountain on stilts, sadly afflicted with polio in his childhood, carried the same name. Mr. and Mr. Kumar taught me biology and Islam. Mr. and Mr. Kumar led me to study zoology and religious studies at the University of Toronto. Mr. and Mr. Kumar were the prophets of my Indian youth.

We prayed together and we practised dhikr, the recitation of the ninety-nine revealed names of God. He was a hafiz, one who knows the Qur’an by heart, and he sang it in a slow, simple chant.

My Arabic was never very good, but I loved its sound. The guttural eruptions and long flowing vowels rolled just beneath my comprehension like a beautiful brook. I gazed into this brook for long spells of time. It was not wide, just one man’s voice, but it was as deep as the universe.

I described Mr. Kumar’s place as a hovel. Yet no mosque, church or temple ever felt so sacred to me. I sometimes came out of that bakery feeling heavy with glory. I would climb onto my bicycle and pedal that glory through the air.

Source: *Life of Pi*, Chapter 20
1.2.1 “this pious baker”
   a) Where and under what circumstances did Pi meet the second Mr Kumar? (2)
   b) What is this Mr Kumar’s religion? (1)

1.2.2 Quote two words or phrases from the extract which suggest the second Mr Kumar was a humble man and did not believe in showy religious displays. (2)

1.2.3 In your own words, what was the immediate effect on Pi of praying with Mr Kumar? (2)

1.2.4 “Mr. and Mr. Kumar were the prophets of my Indian youth.” Briefly explain the long-term influence each of these men had on developing the two sides of Pi’s nature, and how this combination helped him to survive his ordeal. (4)

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[25]

Contextual question 2
Read the following extracts from Life of Pi and answer the questions that follow them. Remember to answer in your own words, except when quoting.

2.1 Extract A

I was not wounded in any part of my body, but I had never experienced such intense pain, such a ripping of the nerves, such an ache of the heart.

He would not make it. He would drown. He was hardly moving forward and his movements were weak. His nose and mouth kept dipping underwater.

Only his eyes were steadily on me. “What are you doing, Richard Parker? Don’t you love life? Keep swimming then! TREEEEE! TREEEEEEE! Kick with your legs. Kick! Kick! Kick!”

He stirred in the water and made to swim.

“And what of my extended family – birds, beasts and reptiles? They too have drowned. Every single thing I value in life has been destroyed. And I am allowed no explanation? I am to suffer hell without any account from heaven? In that case, what is the purpose of reason, Richard Parker? Is it no more than to shine at practicalities – the getting of food, clothing and shelter? Why can’t reason give greater answers? Why can we throw a question further than we can pull in an answer? Why such a vast net if there’s so little fish to catch?”

His head was barely above water. He was looking up, taking in the sky one last time. There was a lifebuoy in the boat with a rope tied to it. I took hold of it and waved it in the air.

“Do you see this lifebuoy, Richard Parker? Do you see it? Catch hold of it! HUMPP! I’ll try again. HUMPP!”

He was too far. But the sight of the lifebuoy flying his way gave him hope. He revived and started beating the water with vigorous, desperate strokes.

“That’s right! One, two. One, two. One, two. Breathe when you can. Watch for the waves. TREEEEE! TREEEEE! TREEEEE! TREEEEE!”

My heart was chilled to ice. I felt ill with grief. But there was no time for frozen shock. It was shock in activity. Something in me did not want to give up on life, was unwilling to let go, wanted to fight to the very end. Where that part of me got the heart, I don’t know.

Source: Life of Pi, Chapter 37
2.1.1 What had just happened to Pi?
2.1.2 “I was not wounded in any part of my body”. Explain Pi’s source of pain and his use of “heart” in this extract.
2.1.3 “And what of my extended family – birds, beasts and reptiles?” (line 9). Explain the significance in the context of the novel of Pi referring to these animals as his “extended family”.
2.1.4 TREEEEE! What is making this sound? Briefly explain what role it plays in Pi’s survival.
2.1.5 “I am to suffer hell without any account from heaven?” Briefly describe one instance during his ordeal when Pi experiences “hell”, and one when he experiences “heaven”.
2.1.6 “In that case, what is the purpose of reason ... getting of food, clothing and shelter?” (lines 11-13). Explain the irony of Pi’s question, “what is the purpose of reason” and “no more than shine at practicalities” in the light of the ordeal he is about to go through.
2.1.7 “Why can we throw a question further than we can pull in an answer? Why such a vast net if there’s so little fish to catch?” (lines 13-14). Explain how this image foreshadows future events in the novel.

2.2 Extract B

"Mr. Patel, please calm down."
"If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? Isn’t love hard to believe?"
"Mr. Patel–"
"Don’t you bully me with your politeness! Love is hard to believe, ask any lover. Life is hard to believe, ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer. What is your problem with hard to believe?"
"We’re just being reasonable."
"So am I! I applied my reason at every moment. Reason is excellent for getting food, clothing and shelter. Reason is the very best tool kit. Nothing beats reason for keeping tigers away. But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater."
"Calm down, Mr. Patel, calm down."
Mr. Chiba: (translation) "The bathwater? Why is he talking about bathwater?" (translation)
"How can I be calm? You should have seen Richard Parker!"
"Yes, yes."
"Huge. Teeth like this! Claws like scimitars!"

Source: Life of Pi, Chapter 99

2.2.1 Who tells Pi to “calm down”?
2.2.2 “If you stumble at believability” List two things in Pi’s story these men find hard to believe.
2.2.3 “But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater.” Briefly discuss Pi’s statement about the effect of “mere believability” on one’s life and how this relates to a major theme of the novel.
2.2.4 Identify the figure of speech in the last line and comment on its effectiveness.
Contextual question 3
Read the following extracts from *Life of Pi* and answer the questions that follow them. Remember to answer in your own words, except when quoting.

3.1 Extract A

Daybreak came. It happened quickly, yet by imperceptible degrees. A corner of the sky changed colours. The air began filling with light. The calm sea opened up around me like a great book. Still it felt like night.

Suddenly it was day.

Warmth came only when the sun, looking like an electrically lit orange, broke across the horizon, but I didn’t need to wait that long to feel it. With the very first rays of light it came alive in me: hope. As things emerged in outline and filled with colour, hope increased until it was like a song in my heart. Oh, what it was to bask in it! Things would work out yet. The worst was over. I had survived the night. Today I would be rescued. To think that, to string those words together in my mind, was itself a source of hope. Hope fed on hope. As the horizon became a neat, sharp line, I scanned it eagerly. The day was clear again and visibility was perfect. I imagined Ravi would greet me first and with a tease. “What’s this?” he would say. “You find yourself a great big lifeboat and you fill it with animals? You think you’re Noah or something?”

Source: *Life of Pi*, Chapter 45

3.1.1 Briefly place this extract from the novel in context. (1)
3.1.2 “Still it felt like night” Account for Pi’s state of mind at this moment. (2)
3.1.3 In what ways does Pi’s mood change at sunrise? Quote to support your answer. (2)
3.1.4 “Today I would be rescued.” Is Pi being realistic? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
3.1.5 Comment on how darkness and light reflect Pi’s changing situation and state of mind/emotions at various times during his ordeal. (4)
3.1.6 “You think you’re Noah or something?” Account for the tone of the question Pi imagines Ravi asking him. (2)
3.1.7 What are two important differences between Noah’s voyage and Pi’s voyage? (2)

3.2 Extract B

I was stiff, sore and exhausted, barely grateful to be still alive. The words “Plan Number Six, Plan Number Six, Plan Number Six” repeated themselves in my mind like a mantra and brought me a small measure of comfort, though I couldn’t recall for the life of me what Plan Number Six was.

Warmth started coming to my bones. I closed the rain catcher. I wrapped myself with the blanket and curled up on my side in such a way that no part of me touched the water. I fell asleep. I don’t know how long I slept. It was mid-morning when I awoke, and hot. The blanket was nearly dry. It had been a brief bout of deep sleep. I lifted myself onto an elbow.

All about me was flatness and infinity, an endless panorama of blue. There was nothing to block my view. The vastness hit me like a punch in the stomach. I fell back, winded. This raft was a joke. It was nothing but a few sticks and a little cork held together by string. Water came through every crack. The depth beneath would make a bird dizzy.

Part 4: Exam preparation
3.2.1 “barely grateful to be still alive”
Account for Pi’s situation this point in the novel. (1)

3.2.2 What is the difference between Pi’s mood at sunrise in Extract A and his mood in Extract B, and how is this related to his situation? (2)

3.2.3 The third paragraph (lines 8–14) describes Pi’s surroundings and his situation. Identify one of the similes in the paragraph which conveys his extreme vulnerability and comment on its effectiveness. (2)

3.2.4 What were the details of Plan Number Six? (2)

3.2.5 In what specific ways was Plan Number Seven likely to be a more effective survival strategy and what role does Pi’s past history play in helping this plan to succeed? (3)

[10]
[25]

Essay questions

Tips on answering essay questions

Planning and writing the essay

1. Analyse the topic or question and write down the key words which show you what the question wants you to do, for example ‘discuss’ or ‘give your opinion’.

2. Plan your essay:
   ◦ Brainstorm the topic – writing down all the ideas which come to you – your opinion and incidents which support this.
   ◦ Draw a mind map of the main points, and points which come out of these. Add examples and quotes to your mind map. These will be the paragraphs of the body of your essay.
   ◦ Plan your opening paragraph/introduction. This should consist of two or three sentences showing that you understand the topic or question, and briefly how you will respond to the topic/question, whether you agree or disagree and a general sentence on how you are going to support your opinion.
   ◦ Plan your concluding paragraph which will sum up your viewpoint and emphasise what you have said in the body of your essay. Do not introduce new points. Restate your view, but using different words to those in your introduction. You may find you will revisit this paragraph when you have developed your points in your essay.
   ◦ Number your points on your mind map according to the order of your paragraphs.
3. Write your essay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do not use:</th>
<th>Do use:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>colloquial language or slang, abbreviations or contractions such as can't or it's</td>
<td>formal language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subheadings</td>
<td>the present tense throughout your essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short quotations or references to incidents in the novel to support your points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Start off writing your introduction based on the points you have for this.

5. Follow the order of points according to your mind map plan to develop your argument. Check that each paragraph covers one main point of your argument you are developing, and has examples from the novel to support or illustrate this. Here is an example of a possible mind map for the sample essay question, Essay question 1 on page 46:

- Intro: Break down question: PI's fear of attack → ironically Richard Parker gives him will to survive → peace, wholeness
- Richard Parker = a challenge + companionship → gives Pi will to survive but how to keep Richard Parker at distance
- Logical reasons to keep Richard Parker alive + at safe distance → details of plan
- Skills developed as result of plan → ensure supply of food + water
- Plan of action → ensure Richard Parker does not attack
- Positive emotional results for Pi
- Conclusion: spiritual wholeness and peace result → irony → refer back to question

- Make sure you refer to events in the novel – every point must be substantiated.
- Connect your paragraphs and points using words like ‘however’, ‘furthermore’, ‘thus’ and ‘therefore’.
- Keep referring back to the topic and to your mind map to make sure you stay on the topic.
- Write the conclusion according to your plan and mind map.

6. Check your essay. Read through your essay and ensure that you have not strayed from the question. Check that you have:
- substantiated each point of your argument with evidence from the text
- outlined in your introduction how you are answering the question
- used a formal register, no slang or colloquial language
- written in the third person
- used the present tense throughout
- not used subheadings
- underlined the title of the novel when referring to it
- crossed out any rough work, such as your mind map.
7. Assessment: Your essay will be assessed out of 25 marks. There will be 15 marks for content (interpretation of topic, depth of argument, justification and grasp of text) and 10 marks for structure and language (structure, logical flow and presentation; language, tone and style).

Essay question 1
"It was Richard Parker who calmed me down. It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness."
Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss this statement made by Pi at the end of the novel. Describe how Richard Parker changes from being an agent of death for Pi to being his saviour.

Essay question 2
"Life of Pi is a castaway story, a coming of age story, an adventure story, a fable, an allegory." Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss which two, or combination of these, you think best describes Life of Pi. Support your argument by referring to Pi’s character and to incidents in the novel.

Essay question 3
"Martel’s story promises to be improbable, but he skillfully demolishes the reader’s scepticism by setting up events in the young Pi’s life that almost naturally lead to his biggest ordeal." Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss the various ways in which Martel makes Pi’s story believable.

Essay question 4
"We fight no matter the cost of battle, the losses we take, the improbability of success. We fight to the very end. It’s not a question of courage. It’s something constitutional, an inability to let go."
Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you briefly describe five things Pi learns that help him to survive and say which tactic you consider to have been most essential to his survival and why. What, as a ‘civilised’ human being, does he lose in the process?

Essay question 5
Of central importance to this novel is the theme of survival, even in seemingly impossible and adverse conditions. For Pi, the challenge of surviving operates on several levels. First, there is the necessity of physical survival, but just as important is the spiritual and emotional survival. Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss this statement with reference to incidents in the novel which show how he developed his physical survival skills. By referring to Pi’s character, show how the emotional and spiritual part of him aided his survival, and how this side was strengthened by his ordeal.

Essay question 6
Pi’s full name, Piscine Molitor Patel, was inspired by a Parisian swimming pool that “the gods would have delighted to swim in”. The shortened form refers to a mathematical symbol or concept. Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss the significance of both of Pi’s names in relation to a theme in the novel.
Sample essay

Here is a possible response to Essay question 1. Do not learn it off by heart, but use it to help you form your own opinion and as a guide as to how to structure your essay.

“It was Richard Parker who calmed me down. It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness.”

Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss this statement made by Pi at the end of the novel. Describe how Richard Parker changes from being an agent of death for Pi to being his saviour.

When Pi finds himself drifting in a small lifeboat with a tiger, he is full of fear, knowing that the animal will inevitably kill and devour him. This essay will discuss how Richard Parker provides Pi with two things essential to his survival: companionship and the challenge of keeping him alive and training the tiger to keep a safe distance. In this way, the tiger instead of being his killer, ironically helps Pi to find the will to live, as well as bringing him emotional and spiritual peace and wholeness.

Although at first Richard Parker represents an agent of death to Pi, Pi comes to realise that he and Richard Parker can survive if Pi can overcome the challenges presented by the tiger. In this way he can also overcome his deep despair at the loss of his family.

At first, he thinks he can survive if he allows the tiger to die of hunger and thirst so the tiger will no longer threaten his safety. When he thinks logically about this plan, he realises that the tiger, driven by extreme hunger and thirst, could leap into the sea and attack him on his raft. He also realises that he does not want to face his ordeal completely alone. Thus he decides he has to keep Richard Parker alive at all costs and find a way of preventing the tiger from attacking him.

This decision pushes him into developing survival skills, such as catching fish and sea turtles. He also ensures a ration of fresh water from rain and from the stilts which convert seawater to fresh water. In this way he ensures a regular supply of food both for himself and for Richard Parker.

In order to keep Richard Parker at a safe distance, and to establish his dominance over the tiger, Pi successfully uses his knowledge of animal psychology and lion taming. His positive reinforcement is food and water; his negative reinforcement is blowing his whistle and rocking the boat to make the tiger seasick.

Thus Pi manages to develop valuable skills, which in turn give him confidence and hope. Ironically, during their ordeal, Richard Parker turns out to be Pi’s companion rather than his killer, and comes to represent a family member to Pi in the sense that the tiger is a creature for which Pi has to care and to whom he expresses his most intimate thoughts and feelings.

In the end, having survived his ordeal, Pi feels physically and emotionally stronger. The love he develops for the tiger brings him wholeness and peace, since it is love, and the love of God, which he has been seeking in his pursuit of his three religions.
Part 5: Answers

Test yourself on the background to Life of Pi

1. In India
3. France
4. No it does not.
5. A castaway story is about a person or persons who are cast adrift or ashore (usually on an island) as a survivor or survivors of a shipwreck. Pi is cast adrift as a result of the sinking of the Tsimtsum.

Test yourself on the Author’s note

1. Yann Martel. He is writing as a fictitious author to add another point of view to the novel and insight into Pi’s character and his story.
2. To find inspiration for a new novel.

Test yourself on Chapter 1

1. Religion and zoology
2. As a result of his ordeal, he now sees the world in both scientific and religious terms, and the one is informing and enriching the other.
3. No

Test yourself on Chapters 2 and 3

1. He was named by Francis Adirumbasamy, who was a swimming champion. Adirumbasamy named Pi after a famous swimming pool in Paris.
2. He taught Pi to swim.

Test yourself on Chapter 4

1. It was happy. He had loving parents and the Pondicherry Zoo was a free and fascinating place for a child.
2. They think that a wild animal could not possibly feel free and happy confined in a cage.
3. Pi argues that animals, as long as there is a safe distance between them and they have enough food and water, are content.

Test yourself on Chapters 5 and 6

1. His classmates deliberately mispronounced his name as “pissing”.
2. Ravi’s physique was impressive and he was good at sports, especially cricket.
3. The ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter, approximated as 3.14.

Test yourself on Chapter 7

1. He believes in science and verifiable scientific evidence. Religion is misleading and hinders one from the scientific ‘truth’.
2. His recovery from polio was due to medication and not prayer.
3. He sees atheists as having a kind of faith – they believe firmly in reason, which gives their lives meaning. Agnostics are in a permanent state of doubt and therefore do not have any kind of clear belief to give their lives meaning.

Test yourself on Chapters 8–11

1. Humans. They injure and cause the deaths of animals by feeding them harmful things.
2. People who invest animals with human qualities, who see an animal, not for what it is, but as cute or devoted or vicious and treat it accordingly, in an unnatural way.
3. He felt deeply shocked and afraid.
4. In this way they will understand and treat animals as they should be treated and ensure their health and welfare.

Test yourself on Chapters 12–14

1. The tamer does not need physical strength. He needs to establish himself as an alpha male.
2. An omega male is more likely to be submissive to taming than an alpha male, which is usually the dominant and most powerful male in a pack or pride.

Test yourself on Chapters 15–17

1. He still practises all three religions.
2. All three religions see the divine, or God, in everything, and believe in an all-embracing love.
3. Father Martin showed him that, although Christ suffered, everything he did was inspired by love.

Test yourself on Chapters 18–20

1. He was curious about what it is really like, having heard bad stories about the Muslim school.
2. He finds himself uplifted and full of glory.
3. He practises Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Test yourself on Chapters 21 and 22

1. An agnostic misses that ‘leap of faith’, whether it be a faith in religion or in reason, either or both of which give meaning to life, and thus realises that his or her life has been devoid of meaning and richness.

Test yourself on Chapters 23 and 24

1. He met them on the beach near their home.
2. They argued about which of their respective religions was the best (and only) religion.
3. “I just want to love God.”
4. They accepted it philosophically.

Test yourself on Chapters 25–28

1. Each of the religious leaders and their followers saw Pi as having betrayed their religion and as having tricked them. They saw his defection as a kind of heresy.
2. They tried to dissuade and distract him but in time accepted and respected his wishes.

Test yourself on Chapters 29 and 30

1. The State of Emergency had suppressed democracy, the constitution and freedom of speech. He was pessimistic about the future in the country.
2. He was not looking for them and had assumed Pi was living alone.

Test yourself on Chapters 31 and 32

1. He sees them as Allah’s divine creations.
2. Mr Kumar, the biology teacher, classifies and admires the zebra as a fine specimen; the Sufi praises Allah for this wonderful creation. This indicates that both men admire the animal, one from a scientific point of view, the other from a religious point of view.

Test yourself on Chapter 33

1. That she and the rest of Pi’s family could have died.

Test yourself on Chapters 34 and 35

1. There was a lot of paper work involved in selling the animals and preparing to export them.
2. He feels great excitement.

Test yourself on Chapter 36

1. The ‘author’ realises that Pi is not alone in the world. Even though the ‘author’ has suspected that Pi has lost his immediate family in some disaster, he realises Pi has formed his own family in Canada.

Test yourself on Chapter 37

1. He got the whistle from the lifejacket he was wearing when he was thrown into the lifeboat.
2. He realises the tiger could attack and eat him.

Test yourself on Chapters 38 and 39

1. His brother Ravi.
2. They did not jump, but threw Pi overboard.
1. He thinks the hyena was on board before he, Pi, landed in the boat. The sailors were perhaps hoping that Pi would get rid of the hyena and make the boat safe for them.

2. If it were not for the hyena they would not have thrown Pi into the lifeboat and he would not be alive.

3. He remembers her at the zoo as being gentle, protective and maternal, as his mother was.

1. "catholicity of taste"

2. He felt horror and disgust at the ruthless savagery. He could not imagine himself ever descending to that level.

3. He felt sympathy for her. Orange Juice looked human and he identified with her as he was also seasick.

4. A shipping clerk mixed up the tiger’s name – Thirsty – with the name of his captor – Richard Parker.

1. Richard Parker is aboard and it is afraid of him.

2. He is seasick.

3. He finds water on the lifeboat in a locker.

4. He rashly eats and drinks his fill, not thinking about rationing the food and water to last in case they are not rescued.

1. "lungs have flown away like a bird”; “guts have slithered away like a snake.”; “tongue drops dead like an opossum”

2. Pi cannot depend on the tiger dying first. He also needs the tiger’s companionship in his lonely ordeal.

3. He realises there is little hope of rescue and feels overwhelmed by all he has to do in order to survive.

1. He uses them to produce fresh water from salt water.

2. He has worked hard, doing everything possible to ensure a supply of water and food, and to fix the raft. Having done this, he can relax.

1. He feels like a murderer. He had never killed any living thing before and he was a vegetarian according to his Hinduism.

2. He compares himself to Cain. Cain had killed his brother, a terrible sin in the eyes of God, and was haunted by guilt.

3. He is one of the chief Hindu deities who is believed to have been a fish in one of his incarnations. Pi thanks him for having success with his fishing.

4. When he killed the flying fish he felt like a murderer (see Chapter 61). During and after killing the dorado he feels the excitement of a hunter.

1. Pi compares the fish scales sticking to him to Hindu tilaks and himself hauling the turtle on board to the physically powerful Hindu god Hanuman. These give his actions divine meaning; he sees himself as part of a religious story. Also he sees his good fortune in catching so many sea creatures as a divine gift.

2. As a Hindu Pi was a vegetarian and believed that no form of life should be injured or killed.
3. He realised the chances of being rescued were extremely slim.

Test yourself on Chapters 70–72
Page 17

1. The tiger struck at him and he landed overboard.
2. He learned to read Richard Parker’s body language and sounds he made and to anticipate the animal’s next move.
3. It acted as negative reinforcement.

Test yourself on Chapters 73–75
Page 18

1. It shows he has not lost his religious faith or his desire to connect with holy words.
2. He lumps his feelings in with the practical details of his daily survival, perhaps showing that the business of survival is paramount.
3. He practises Christian, Hindu and Islam rituals.

Test yourself on Chapters 76 and 77
Page 19

1. Pi handled the tiger’s faeces, blew the whistle and stared hard at him. The tiger retreated.

Test yourself on Chapters 78–81
Page 18

1. He sees his success in managing to feed, train and keep the tiger at a safe distance as empowering and as enabling him to survive.

Test yourself on Chapters 82–84
Page 18

1. He knows that the natural habitat of Bengal Tigers is a tidal mangrove coast and that they are used to drinking a certain amount of seawater.
2. He feels exhausted and depressed.

Test yourself on Chapters 85–89
Page 19

1. “Praise be to Allah ... Judgment Day”; “miracle”; “outbreak of divinity”
2. An oil tanker almost runs them down.
3. He realises the tiger has become his companion and his reason for living and continuing to hope.

Test yourself on Chapters 90 and 91
Page 20

1. Their eyes become encrusted with salt and blindness is also a symptom of starvation.
2. He thinks Richard Parker is speaking to him. He is hallucinating from lack of food and water, and it is also an indication of his feeling of close connectedness to the tiger in their mutual ordeal.
3. The castaway soon attempts to kill and eat Pi.
4. He was driven by extreme “unremitting” hunger and was in a hallucinatory state.

Test yourself on Chapter 92
Page 20

1. He has already imagined seeing the lights of a ship on more than one occasion. The island does not seem real as the trees of the island seem to be rooted in the sea rather than in soil.
2. It proves to be edible.
3. Pi feasts on the dead fish floating in ponds and Richard Parker feeds on the meerkats.
4. He has found out that the island becomes carnivorous at night.
5. He discovers that all of the fruit of one of the trees contain human teeth. He realizes then that the island is carnivorous and has devoured other castaways.

Test yourself on Chapters 93 and 94
Page 21

1. He was in the depths of despair and saw no hope.
2. He makes for the jungle and disappears.
3. He expects the tiger to turn around and give him some gesture of farewell.
4. He expresses gratitude to Richard Parker for being his companion and helping him survive his ordeal, his rescuers, the medical staff who treated him, the Mexican officials who smoothed his departure from Mexico and the Canadian officials who facilitated his entry into university.
1. They find the following hard to believe: the orang-utan floating on bananas; carnivorous trees and the human teeth embedded in the fruit of the trees; that Pi survived with a tiger sharing the lifeboat; the meerkats; and Pi’s encounter with the blind castaway.

2. Pi’s mother, a French cook and a Chinese sailor feature in Pi’s second story.

3. The details are not verifiable and, like Pi’s first story, the second story does not explain the sinking of the Timsudum.

4. His first story is the “better story” because, while inspiring fear and possible incredulity in the listener, we find the tale showing the will of a person to survive in the face of impossible odds inspiring and leaving us open to believe in God.

5. They decide to believe in the first story. Although it is incredible and not verifiable, it is nevertheless a story of immense courage and endurance.

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2. a) The whole of Part One. It describes the setting, Pondicherry and introduces Pi and his observations of the behaviour of wild animals in captivity. It describes his search to reconcile scientific and religious world views. All of these are crucial to events in Part Two.

b) With the help of the two Mr Kumars. He realises that Mr Kumar, the biology teacher, has a kind of faith – science and atheism – which sustains him and gives meaning to his life. Mr Kumar, the Sufi, finds meaning in life from his religion, seeing God or Allah in everything.

c) This conflict reaches a climax in Chapter 93, after Pi has experienced the blow to his hope and optimism on the carnivorous island. Pi gives up hope and “turns to God”.

d) At the end the reader is left hanging, not knowing what happens next, or whether either of Pi’s stories is the correct, verifiable one. However, the glimpses we have been given of the adult Pi throughout Part One suggest that after his ordeal he chose “the better story” and retained his religious beliefs.

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Test yourself on the characters

1. Pi: curious, intelligent, interested in animal behaviour, deeply religious, knows about lion taming
   Pi’s mother: loving, protective, loves to read
   Pi’s father: natural instinct for zoo keeping, not religious
   Ravi: sporty, mocking, popular at school

2. Mr Kumar, the biology teacher, has faith in science, a scientific view of the world.
   Mr Kumar, the Sufi, sees God or Allah in everything.

3. The cook, Pi’s mother, the Chinese sailor. Pi makes up a more believable story without animals for the Japanese investigators.

4. Hyena: savagery, ruthlessness, cruelty, not fussy what it eats; zebra: helplessness, victimhood; orang-utan: gentleness, maternal and loving nature; tiger: power, energy, ruthlessness, dignity in suffering

5. Orange Juice, the orang-utan. He identifies with her seasickness and misses his mother and wants to see her as a human maternal figure.

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Test yourself: Who is the author of the novel?

1. The author of the Author’s note is a fictitious author; it is he who visits the adult Pi in Canada. However, some parts of the Author’s note seem to be Yann Martel thinly disguised: Martel lives in Canada, visited India to gain inspiration after a failed novel and it was the Canada Council for the Arts which in fact granted him support for writing Life of Pi.

2. They provide a different point of view of Pi as a character who has changed and developed as a result of his ordeal when he was 16.

3. Pi is middle aged. He is 16 at the time of his ordeal.

4. They blend in with his childhood – his experiences at the zoo where as a boy he is curious about animal behaviour. They show how knowledgeable he is about animal behaviour and how this proves to be crucial
5. This adds yet another point of view to the novel, providing a cynical perspective of Pi’s incredible story. By hearing Pi’s voice directly, and the responses of the Japanese investigators, we are able to see his story through their eyes.

Test yourself on the themes of the novel

1. The second story is more believable but does not have the mystery and richness of the first. It does not inspire us as a story of great courage and the human will to survive. There is no mention of the beauty of nature or of God and how religious faith can give you hope. The language used in the second story is flat and lifeless compared to the imagery and vivid descriptions of the first. Pi’s question to these men suggests that, while we cannot know the ultimate truth of the universe, we can be inspired by choosing “the better story”, which can also enrich our lives.

Mr Kumar 1, biology teacher: “Equus burchelli boehmi”; Mr Kumar 2, Sufi: “Allahu akbar”
Mr Kumar 1 responds with the formal scientific/zoo logical name for the zebra.
Mr Kumar 2’s response in Arabic means “God is great”, which Muslims use as an expression of their faith. These responses reflect the two views or ways of seeing the world which Pi manages to reconcile and find complement each other: the scientific and the religious view.

3. When wrestling his first sea turtle onto the boat he recalls the Hindu story of Hanuman – the physically powerful Hindu monkey god who helps save Rama’s wife from a demon king. Pi sees Orange Juice as a “sinian Christ on the Cross” which gives spiritual meaning to both her suffering and his ordeal.

Contextual question 1

1.1 Extract A
1.1.1 They are in Pondicherry Zoo.
1.1.2 a) Darkness represents for him ignorance or scientifically unverifiable statements or observations. He equates light with scientific knowledge or verifiable facts.

b) He sees religion as preventing one from seeing the world in clear scientific terms, whereas Pi sees religion as adding richness (light) to one’s view of the world.

1.1.3 B. He declares that God is dead (there is no God)/that science (medicine) saved him from polio, not God/that when we die that is the end. (Any one of these to show non-belief in God.)

1.1.4 a) He observed the sea and Richard Parker closely and paid attention to every detail in order to use this knowledge to catch food and succeed in keeping alive and dominating the tiger, in order to survive.

b) It had the opposite effect – his wonder at creation and his belief in a higher power helping him to overcome fear and to use his ingenuity to survive against tremendous odds convinced him that God exists.

1.1.5 He frequently experienced fear and despair, believing that the odds were stacked against him surviving.

1.2 Extract B
1.2.1 a) Pi wanted to find out about the Islamic religion but was afraid to enter the mosque. Instead he entered a bakery where Mr Kumar was the baker.

b) Islam

1.2.2 “as plain as a shadow”, “he sang in a slow, simple chant”, “Mr. Kumar’s place as a hovel”. (any three)

1.2.3 He was filled with religious inspiration or he felt exalted. “feeling heavy with glory.”

1.2.4 His biology teacher taught him to appreciate the value of science and scientific observation, the second pious Kumar taught him about profound prayer and religious belief. Pi was able to use the former in developing his knowledge about animal psychology and his fishing skills, and the latter to overcome fear and despair and find meaning in suffering.
2.1 Extract A

2.1.1 The ship he and his family were travelling on to Canada had just sunk. (1)

2.1.2 It was the pain of loss – of all those he loved: his family and the animals. For Pi his heart is the seat of his emotions – his pain in the first paragraph, and of his grief in the last paragraph. The heart is also associated with love. (3)

2.1.3 Throughout the novel he constantly blurs the boundaries between animals and humans, often seeing himself, and animals, as members of the same family – God’s family. (Or Richard Parker and he formed a family in the course of their castaway existence.) (2)

2.1.4 The whistle from a life jacket. He uses it to dominate Richard Parker and train him to be subservient to him and keep a safe distance from him. (2)

2.1.5 He is referring to emotional states: he experiences hell when he is overcome with fear and despair that he will not survive. He experiences heaven when he succeeds in overcoming fear and in developing survival skills, and when he becomes aware and in awe of the beauty of nature. (4)

2.1.6 At that moment he can see no point in “reason” in the form of clear scientific thinking and close observation, yet this is what helps him to catch marine life to feed himself and the tiger, as well as to train the tiger. He becomes skilled at “practicalities”. These help him to survive. (any three separate points) (3)

2.1.7 Later, in order to survive, Pi learns to fish and to catch and pull turtles onto the lifeboat. (any one point) (1)

2.2 Extract B

2.2.1 Mr Okomoto, the Japanese investigator who is looking into the sinking of the Tsimtsum. (1)

2.2.2 The presence of a tiger on the lifeboat; the carnivorous algae island; the existence of meerkats on the island; the blind fellow castaway. (any two) (2)

2.2.3 He is suggesting that in everyday life people need stories to be factual, rational and verifiable. The author of the novel is suggesting than Pi’s story, like life, is the “better story”: it is a story enriched by religious belief as well as inspired by a human being’s will to survive. (4)

2.2.4 Simile: a scimitar is a sharp curved sword, as are the tiger’s claws. Pi is emphasising the size and deadly sharpness of the claws. (2)

3.1 Extract A

3.1.1 The end of Pi’s first full night spent on the lifeboat after the sinking of the Tsimtsum. (1)

3.1.2 He is still experiencing some of the fear and despair brought on by his situation and the darkness of the night. (2)

3.1.3 He begins to feel hope and optimism that he will be rescued. “With the very first rays of light it came alive in me: hope”/ “... hope increased until it was like a song in my heart”/ “Today I would be rescued”. (2)

3.1.4 He is not being realistic, but denying the fact that the ship sank with all on board – when he tried to go below to his family, he was met by a wall of water. (2)

3.1.5 When he is certain that he will never be rescued or cannot survive, he experiences the ‘darkness’ of despair. When the weather is calm and he manages to catch enough food to keep him and the tiger alive, he feels the ‘light’ of hope and the joy in the beauty of nature. (4)

3.1.6 The tone is mocking or ironic. Ravi, Pi’s older brother, often affectionately mocked Pi’s religious beliefs. (2)

3.1.7 Noah’s voyage lasted only 40 days; Pi’s lasted seven months. There was total peace among the animals on board the ark and at no time was he in danger from the animals – the animals on the lifeboat began to brutally attack one another and Pi feared for his life. (2)
3.2 Extract B

3.2.1 There had been a heavy storm the night before which had badly damaged his raft and the lifeboat.

3.2.2 In Extract A he feels hope and is optimistic, having survived his first night. In Extract B, he feels fear and despair when confronted by the storm damage.

3.2.3 “The vastness hit me like a punch in the stomach.” Comparing the huge emptiness and pitilessness of the surrounding ocean with his feelings of powerlessness, fear and shock. “... held on to the surface of the water like fingers gripping the edge of a cliff.” Comparing the floating lifeboat to fingers gripping the edge of a cliff, emphasising the fragility and smallness of the lifeboat and of him in the face of danger.

3.2.4 Wait for the tiger to die of hunger and thirst, so leaving Pi safe from attack.

3.2.5 Plan Number Seven: keep the tiger alive by giving him food and water, and train him to keep a safe distance by means of the lifejacket whistle. This would be a challenge to Pi and supply his need for the companionship of the tiger. At the zoo Pi had acquired knowledge of animal psychology, especially that of large wild animals, as well as the strategy of lion taming by dominating the animal, making it believe the trainer to be an alpha male.

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