Essay Topic:

‘Life of Pi is a story of survival’. Discuss

Key Terms:

‘story’:
- Novel
- Tale
- Narrative

‘survival’:
- Staying alive
- Endurance
- Overcoming hardship
- Facing tough challenges

Contention:

Is Life of Pi a story of survival? YES, IT IS (and an amazing one at that)!
Plan your response:

Question: Why is Pi able to survive such an amazing array of challenges and ordeals?

Answer 1: PHYSICAL SURVIVAL
- First and foremost, Pi must learn to deal with his physical needs.
- Pi has to learn how to support himself and develop new skills: food, water, shelter.
- His knowledge of animals becomes essential in order to tame Richard Parker.
- He must adapt to his situation.

Answer 2: MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SURVIVAL
- Moving past his inability/reluctance to kill the fish: he must accept a different mindset and view of the world if he is to survive in this situation.
- Dealing with the death of his family: Pi must prevent himself from becoming overwhelmed by grief.
- Richard Parker helps in this by providing Pi with strength, purpose and routine.

Answer 3: SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL
- Praying on the boat.
- Thanking God – Pi’s belief still exists despite his circumstances.
- Realisation of his place in creation and the universe helps to accept his situation.
- Belief and faith brings Pi through the darkest moments of his journey, allowing him to retain a sense of humanity and purpose.

Each of these answers has the capacity to become a body paragraph in response to the essay topic.

Pay close attention to the above answers and consider:

1. Can you write three TOPIC SENTENCES that connect each idea with the key terms of the essay topic?
2. Can you find any specific QUOTES or EXAMPLES to support each paragraph? Remember that you will need 3 to 4 quotes per paragraph.
3. Can you think of any other ideas that can be used to either expand on these three answers, or to perhaps provide a fourth body paragraph?
Introduction:

STEP 1: OVERVIEW OF PLOT AND CHARACTERS, LOCATION, AUTHOR AND TITLE
Yann Martel’s Life of Pi explores the fantastic tale of a boy adrift in the Pacific Ocean in the company of a Bengal Tiger.

STEP 2: FOCUS ON THE QUESTION
It focusses on the protagonist’s unlikely survival in the face of many different challenges and obstacles.

STEP 3: OUTLINE YOUR ANSWER
Despite the odds, Pi Patel drew on an inner strength and mental fortitude in order to survive the sinking of the ship that was to take his family to a new life. This strength of mind allowed him to overcome the physical challenges he faced in order to finally reach the shore of Mexico. The one constant that remained throughout Pi’s life was his faith and devotion to God, which gave him meaning in childhood, purpose during his ordeal and comfort later in life.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER:

Yann Martel’s Life of Pi explores the fantastic tale of a boy adrift in the Pacific Ocean in the company of a Bengal Tiger. It focusses on the protagonist’s unlikely survival in the face of many different challenges and obstacles. Despite the odds, Pi Patel drew on an inner strength and mental fortitude in order to survive the sinking of the ship that was to take his family to a new life. This strength of mind allowed him to overcome the physical challenges he faced in order to finally reach the shore of Mexico. The one constant that remained throughout Pi’s life was his faith and devotion to God, which gave him meaning in childhood, purpose during his ordeal and comfort later in life.

Pay close attention to the above Introduction and consider:

1. How has the plot, title and author of the text been established?
2. Is the structure of the essay easily identifiable to the reader?
The ordeal which Pi faced once the Tsimtsum had sunk became one of physical survival against the treacherous elements of the ocean. Pi’s survival was in large part due to the fact that Mamaji had taught Pi to swim, describing it as “[his] gift” to Pi. Knowing how to swim provided Pi with some level of confidence when he was adrift on the boat and meant he could more confidently face the remaining challenges. While Pi was not fearful of the ocean, his physical suffering was immense. Pi “suffered so much” and found himself “rapidly losing strength”. The longer he remained on the boat, the more his “skin was burnt” and his “shrivelled muscles ached”. Ultimately, his suffering prompts Pi to an important realisation: that “survival had to start with [him]”. It is only when he takes charge of his situation, abandons “idle hope” and becomes active in the momentary, immediate needs of survival that Pi is able to build the skills and resources needed to gather water, food and allow himself access to shelter that will allow him to survive this “outstanding story of courage and endurance”. The novel shows the importance of physical endurance and adaptability as essential aspects of the human capacity to survive, and these are an essential first step to Pi’s own survival during his 227 day voyage adrift in the Pacific Ocean.

Pay close attention to the above Body Paragraph and consider:

1. How is the TEEL structure used to present and develop the paragraph’s argument?
2. How have quotes been incorporated into the paragraph?
3. What other examples or ideas could have been included in this paragraph?

You have been presented with an introduction and a first body paragraph.

Now, write your own second and third body paragraphs, and a conclusion to this essay.