Life of Pi
Yann Martel
Context

Yann Martel was born on June 25, 1963, in Salamanca, Spain, to Canadian parents. When Martel was a young boy, his parents joined the Canadian Foreign Services, and the family moved frequently, living in Alaska, France, Costa Rica, Ontario, and British Columbia. Martel went on to study philosophy at Trent University in Ontario, where he discovered a love for writing. After graduating in 1985, Martel lived with his parents and worked a number of odd jobs while continuing to write fiction. He published a collection of short stories, The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios, in 1993 and a novel, Self, in 1996, but neither book received much critical or commercial attention. In 2002, however, Martel’s international literary reputation was sealed with the publication of Life of Pi, a runaway bestseller that went on to win the prestigious Man Booker Prize (awarded each year to the best English-language novel written by a Commonwealth or Irish author) and had since been translated into thirty languages. Fox 2000 pictures bought the screen rights to Martel’s novel, and a feature film is expected in 2008.

Life of Pi is set against the tumultuous period of Indian history known as the Emergency. In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was found guilty of charges related to her 1971 election campaign and was ordered to resign. Instead—and in response to a rising tide of strikes and protests that were paralyzing the government—Gandhi declared a state of emergency, suspending constitutional rights and giving herself the power to rule by decree. The Emergency lasted for eighteen months and was officially ended in March 1977 when Gandhi called for a new round of elections. The historical legacy of the Emergency has been highly controversial: while civil liberties in this emerging democracy were severely curtailed and Gandhi’s political opponents found themselves jailed, abused, and tortured, India’s economy experienced a much-needed stabilization and growth. In Life of Pi, Piscine (Pi) Molitor Patel’s father, a zookeeper in Pondicherry, India, grows nervous about the current political situation. Speculating that Gandhi might try to take over his zoo and faced with depressing economic conditions, Pi’s father decides to sell off his zoo animals and move his family to Canada, thus setting the main action of the novel into motion.

Though only a relatively brief section of Life of Pi is actually set in India, the country’s eclectic makeup is reflected throughout the novel. Pi is raised as a Hindu but as a young boy discovers both Christianity and Islam and decides to practice all three religions simultaneously. In the Author’s Note, an elderly Indian man describes the story of Pi as “a story that will make you believe in God,” and Life of Pi continuously grapples with questions of faith; as an adherent to the three most prominent religions in India, Pi provides a unique perspective on issues of Indian spirituality. India’s diverse culture is further reflected in Martel’s choice of Pondicherry as a setting. India was a British colony for nearly two hundred years, and consequently most of the nation has been deeply influenced by British culture. However, Pondicherry, a tiny city in southern India, was once the capital of French India and as such has retained a uniquely French flavor that sets it apart from the rest of the nation. Perhaps reflecting Yann Martel’s own nomadic childhood, Pi Patel pointedly begins his life in a diverse cultural setting before encountering French, Mexican, Japanese, and Canadian characters along his journey.

Life of Pi can be characterized as a postcolonial novel, because of its post-Independence Indian setting as well as its Canadian authorship. Like many postcolonial novels, such as those of Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez, Life of Pi can also be classified as a work of magical realism, a literary genre in which fantastic elements—such as animals with human personalities or an island with cannibalistic trees—appear in an otherwise realistic setting. Martel’s novel could equally be described as a bildungsroman (a coming-of-age tale) or an adventure story. Life of Pi even flirts with nonfiction genres. The Author’s Note, for example, claims that the story of Piscine Molitor Patel is a true story that the author, Yann Martel, heard while backpacking through Pondicherry, and the novel, with its first-person narrator, is structured as a memoir. At the end of the novel, we are presented with interview transcripts, another genre of nonfiction writing. This mixing of fiction and nonfiction reflects the twist ending of the novel, in which the veracity of Pi’s fantastical story is called into doubt and the reader, like Pi’s Japanese interrogators, is forced to confront unsettling questions about the nature of truth itself.
Many critics have noted the book’s resemblance to Ernest Hemingway’s novel The Old Man and the Sea. Both novels feature an epic struggle between man and beast. In The Old Man and the Sea, a fisherman struggles to pull in a mighty marlin, while in Life of Pi, Pi and Richard Parker struggle for dominance on the lifeboat. Both the fisherman and Pi learn to respect their animal counterparts; each pair is connected in their mutual suffering, strength, and resolve. Although they are opponents, they are also partners, allies, even doubles. Furthermore, both novels emphasize the importance of endurance. Because death and destruction are inevitable, both novels present life as a choice between only two options: defeat or endurance until destruction. Enduring against all odds elevates both human characters to the status of heroes.

Another, less flattering comparison has been drawn between Life of Pi and acclaimed Brazilian author Moacyr Scliar’s 1981 novel Max and the Cats. In a 2002 interview with Powells.com, Martel discusses reading an unfavorable review of Scliar’s novel in the New York Times Book Review penned by John Updike and, despite Updike’s disparagement, being entranced by the premise. As was later reported, no such review existed, and John Updike himself claimed no knowledge of Scliar’s novel. The similarities between the two novels are unmistakable: in Max and the Cats, a family of German zookeepers sets sail to Brazil. The ship goes down and only one young man survives, stranded at sea with a wild jaguar. Martel claims never to have read Max and the Cats before beginning to write Life of Pi. He has since blamed his faulty memory for the Powells.com gaffe and has declined further discussion on the topic. Scliar considered a lawsuit but is said to have changed his mind after a discussion with Martel. Whatever the real story, Martel mentions Scliar in his Author’s Note, thanking him for “the spark of life.”
Plot Overview

In an Author’s Note, an anonymous author figure explains that he traveled from his home in Canada to India because he was feeling restless. There, while sipping coffee in a café in the town of Pondicherry, he met an elderly man named Francis Adirubasamy who offered to tell him a story fantastic enough to give him faith in God. This story is that of Pi Patel. The author then shifts into the story itself, but not before telling his reader that the account will come across more naturally if he tells it in Pi’s own voice.

Part One is narrated in the first person by Pi. Pi narrates from an advanced age, looking back at his earlier life as a high school and college student in Toronto, then even further back to his boyhood in Pondicherry. He explains that he has suffered intensely and found solace in religion and zoology. He describes how Francis Adirubasamy, a close business associate of his father’s and a competitive swimming champion, taught him to swim and bestowed upon him his unusual name. Pi is named after the Piscine Molitor, a Parisian swimming club with two pools that Adirubasamy used to frequent. We learn that Pi’s father once ran the Pondicherry Zoo, teaching Pi and his brother, Ravi, about the dangerous nature of animals by feeding a live goat to a tiger before their young eyes. Pi, brought up as a Hindu, discovers Christianity, then Islam, choosing to practice all three religions simultaneously. Motivated by India’s political strife, Pi’s parents decide to move the family to Canada; on June 21, 1977, they set sail in a cargo ship, along with a crew and many cages full of zoo creatures.

At the beginning of Part Two, the ship is beginning to sink. Pi clings to a lifeboat and encourages a tiger, Richard Parker, to join him. Then, realizing his mistake in bringing a wild animal aboard, Pi leaps into the ocean. The narrative jumps back in time as Pi describes the explosive noise and chaos of the sinking: crew-members throw him into a lifeboat, where he soon finds himself alone with a zebra, an orangutan, and a hyena, all seemingly in shock. His family is gone. The storm subsides and Pi contemplates his difficult situation. The hyena kills the zebra and the orangutan, and then—to Pi’s intense surprise—Richard Parker reveals himself: the tiger has been in the bottom of the lifeboat all along. Soon the tiger kills the hyena, and Pi and Richard Parker are alone together at sea. Pi subsists on canned water and filtered seawater, emergency rations, and freshly caught sea life. He also provides for the tiger, whom he masters and trains.

The days pass slowly and the lifeboat’s passengers coexist warily. During a bout of temporary blindness brought on by dehydration, Pi has a run-in with another blind castaway. The two discuss food and tether their boats to one another. When the blind man attacks Pi, intending to eat him, Richard Parker kills him. Not long after, the boat pulls up to a strange island of trees that grow directly out of vegetation, without any soil. Pi and Richard Parker stay here for a time, sleeping in their boat and exploring the island during the day. Pi discovers a huge colony of meerkats who sleep in the trees and freshwater ponds. One day, Pi finds human teeth in a tree’s fruit and comes to the conclusion that the island eats people. He and Richard Parker head back out to sea, finally washing ashore on a Mexican beach. Richard Parker runs off, and villagers take Pi to a hospital.

In Part Three, two officials from the Japanese Ministry of Transport interview Pi about his time at sea, hoping to shed light on the fate of the doomed ship. Pi tells the story as above, but it does not fully satisfy the skeptical men. So he tells it again, this time replacing the animals with humans: a ravenous cook instead of a hyena, a sailor instead of a zebra, and his mother instead of the orangutan. The officials note that the two stories match and that the second is far likelier. In their final report, they commend Pi for living so long with an adult tiger.
Character List

Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi) The protagonist of the story. Piscine is the narrator for most of the novel, and his account of his seven months at sea forms the bulk of the story. He gets his unusual name from the French word for pool—and, more specifically, from a pool in Paris in which a close family friend, Francis Adirubasamy, loved to swim. A student of zoology and religion, Pi is deeply intrigued by the habits and characteristics of animals and people.

Richard Parker The Royal Bengal tiger with whom Pi shares his lifeboat. His captor, Richard Parker, named him Thirsty, but a shipping clerk made a mistake and reversed their names. From then on, at the Pondicherry Zoo, he was known as Richard Parker. Weighing 450 pounds and about nine feet long, he kills the hyena on the lifeboat and the blind cannibal. With Pi, however, Richard Parker acts as an omega, or submissive, animal, respecting Pi’s dominance.

The Author The narrator of the (fictitious) Author’s Note, who inserts himself into the narrative at several points throughout the text. Though the author who pens the Author’s Note never identifies himself by name, there are many clues that indicate it is Yann Martel himself, thinly disguised: he lives in Canada, has published two books, and was inspired to write Pi’s life story during a trip to India.

Francis Adirubasamy The elderly man who tells the author Pi’s story during a chance meeting in a Pondicherry coffee shop. He taught Pi to swim as a child and bestowed upon him his unusual moniker. He arranges for the author to meet Pi in person, so as to get a first-person account of his strange and compelling tale. Pi calls him Mamaji, an Indian term that means respected uncle.

Ravi Pi’s older brother. Ravi prefers sports to schoolwork and is quite popular. He teases his younger brother mercilessly over his devotion to three religions.

Santosh Patel Pi’s father. He once owned a Madras hotel, but because of his deep interest in animals decided to run the Pondicherry Zoo. A worrier by nature, he teaches his sons not only to care for and control wild animals, but to fear them. Though raised a Hindu, he is not religious and is puzzled by Pi’s adoption of numerous religions. The difficult conditions in India lead him to move his family to Canada.

Gita Patel Pi’s beloved mother and protector. A book lover, she encourages Pi to read widely. Raised Hindu with a Baptist education, she does not subscribe to any religion and questions Pi’s religious declarations. She speaks her mind, letting her husband know when she disagrees with his parenting techniques. When Pi relates another version of his story to his rescuers, she takes the place of Orange Juice on the lifeboat.

Satish Kumar Pi’s atheistic biology teacher at Petit Séminaire, a secondary school in Pondicherry. A polio survivor, he is an odd-looking man, with a body shaped like a triangle. His devotion to the power of scientific inquiry and explanation inspires Pi to study zoology in college.

Father Martin The Catholic priest who introduces Pi to Christianity after Pi wanders into his church. He preaches a message of love. He, the Muslim Mr. Kumar, and the Hindu pandit disagree about whose religion Pi should practice.

Satish Kumar A plain-featured Muslim mystic with the same name as Pi’s biology teacher. He works in a bakery. Like the other Mr. Kumar, this one has a strong effect on Pi’s academic plans: his faith leads Pi to study religion at college.
The Hindu Pandit One of three important religious figures in the novel. Never given a name, he is outraged when Pi, who was raised Hindu, begins practicing other religions. He and the other two religious leaders are quieted somewhat by Pi’s declaration that he just wants to love God.

Meena Patel Pi’s wife, whom the author meets briefly in Toronto.

Nikhil Patel (Nick) Pi’s son. He plays baseball.

Usha Patel Pi’s young daughter. She is shy but very close to her father.

The Hyena An ugly, intensely violent animal. He controls the lifeboat before Richard Parker emerges.

The Zebra A beautiful male Grant’s zebra. He breaks his leg jumping into the lifeboat. The hyena torments him and eats him alive.

Orange Juice The maternal orangutan that floats to the lifeboat on a raft of bananas. She suffers almost humanlike bouts of loneliness and seasickness. When the hyena attacks her, she fights back valiantly but is nonetheless killed and decapitated.

The Blind Frenchman A fellow castaway whom Pi meets by chance in the middle of the ocean. Driven by hunger and desperation, he tries to kill and cannibalize Pi, but Richard Parker kills him first.

Tomohiro Okamoto An official from the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport, who is investigating the sinking of the Japanese Tsimtsum. Along with his assistant, Atsuro Chiba, Okamoto interviews Pi for three hours and is highly skeptical of his first account.

Atsuro Chiba Okamoto’s assistant. Chiba is the more naïve and trusting of the two Japanese officials, and his inexperience at conducting interviews gets on his superior’s nerves. Chiba agrees with Pi that the version of his ordeal with animals is the better than the one with people.

The Cook The human counterpart to the hyena in Pi’s second story. He is rude and violent and hoards food on the lifeboat. After he kills the sailor and Pi’s mother, Pi stabs him and he dies.

The Sailor The human counterpart to the zebra in Pi’s second story. He is young, beautiful, and exotic. He speaks only Chinese and is very sad and lonely in the lifeboat. He broke his leg jumping off the ship, and it becomes infected. The cook cuts off the leg, and the sailor dies slowly.
Analysis of Major Characters

**Piscine Molitor Patel**

Piscine Molitor Patel is the protagonist and, for most of the novel, the narrator. In the chapters that frame the main story, Pi, as a shy, graying, middle-aged man, tells the author about his early childhood and the shipwreck that changed his life. This narrative device distances the reader from the truth. We don’t know whether Pi’s story is accurate or what pieces to believe. This effect is intentional; throughout Pi emphasizes the importance of choosing the better story, believing that imagination trumps cold, hard facts. As a child, he reads widely and embraces many religions and their rich narratives that provide meaning and dimension to life. In his interviews with the Japanese investigators after his rescue, he offers first the more fanciful version of his time at sea. But, at their behest, he then provides an alternative version that is more realistic but ultimately less appealing to both himself and his questioners. The structure of the novel both illustrates Pi’s defining characteristic, his dependence on and love of stories, and highlights the inherent difficulties in trusting his version of events.

Though the narrative jumps back and forth in time, the novel traces Pi’s development and maturation in a traditional bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story. Pi is an eager, outgoing, and excitable child, dependent on his family for protection and guidance. In school, his primary concerns involve preventing his schoolmates from mispronouncing his name and learning as much as he can about religion and zoology. But when the ship sinks, Pi is torn from his family and left alone on a lifeboat with wild animals. The disaster serves as the catalyst in his emotional growth; he must now become self-sufficient. Though he mourns the loss of his family and fears for his life, he rises to the challenge. He finds a survival guide and emergency provisions. Questioning his own values, he decides that his vegetarianism is a luxury under the conditions and learns to fish. He capably protects himself from Richard Parker and even assumes a parental relationship with the tiger, providing him with food and keeping him in line. The devastating shipwreck turns Pi into an adult, able to fend for himself out in the world alone.

Pi’s belief in God inspires him as a child and helps sustain him while at sea. In Pondicherry, his atheistic biology teacher challenges his Hindu faith in God, making him realize the positive power of belief, the need to overcome the otherwise bleakness of the universe. Motivated to learn more, Pi starts practicing Christianity and Islam, realizing these religions all share the same foundation: belief in a loving higher power. His burgeoning need for spiritual connection deepens while at sea. In his first days on the lifeboat, he almost gives up, unable to bear the loss of his family and unwilling to face the difficulties that still await him. At that point, however, he realizes that the fact he is still alive means that God is with him; he has been given a miracle. This thought gives him strength, and he decides to fight to remain alive. Throughout his adventure, he prays regularly, which provides him with solace, a sense of connection to something greater, and a way to pass the time.

**Richard Parker**

Pi’s companion throughout his ordeal at sea is Richard Parker, a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. Unlike many novels in which animals speak or act like humans, Richard Parker is portrayed as a real animal that acts in ways true to his species. It can be difficult to accept that a tiger and a boy could exist on a lifeboat alone, however, in the context of the novel, it seems plausible. Captured as a cub, Parker grew up in the zoo and is accustomed to a life in captivity. He is used to zookeepers training and providing for him, so he is able to respond to cues from Pi and submit to his dominance. However, he is no docile house cat. He has been tamed, but he still acts instinctually, swimming for the lifeboat in search of shelter and killing the hyena and the blind castaway for food. When the two wash up on the shore of Mexico, Richard Parker doesn’t draw out his parting with Pi, he simply runs off into the jungle, never to be seen again.

Though Richard Parker is quite fearsome, ironically his presence helps Pi stay alive. Alone on the lifeboat, Pi has many issues to face in addition to the tiger onboard: lack of food and water, predatory marine life, treacherous sea currents, and exposure to the elements. Overwhelmed by the circumstances and terrified of
dying, Pi becomes distraught and unable to take action. However, he soon realizes that his most immediate threat is Richard Parker. His other problems now temporarily forgotten, Pi manages, through several training exercises, to dominate Parker. This success gives him confidence, making his other obstacles seem less insurmountable. Renewed, Pi is able to take concrete steps toward ensuring his continued existence: searching for food and keeping himself motivated. Caring and providing for Richard Parker keeps Pi busy and passes the time. Without Richard Parker to challenge and distract him, Pi might have given up on life. After he washes up on land in Mexico, he thanks the tiger for keeping him alive.

Richard Parker symbolizes Pi’s most animalistic instincts. Out on the lifeboat, Pi must perform many actions to stay alive that he would have found unimaginable in his normal life. An avowed vegetarian, he must kill fish and eat their flesh. As time progresses, he becomes more brutish about it, tearing apart birds and greedily stuffing them in his mouth, the way Richard Parker does. After Richard Parker mauls the blind Frenchman, Pi uses the man’s flesh for bait and even eats some of it, becoming cannibalistic in his unrelenting hunger. In his second story to the Japanese investigators, Pi is Richard Parker. He kills his mother’s murderer. Parker is the version of himself that Pi has invented to make his story more palatable, both to himself and to his audience. The brutality of his mother’s death and his own shocking act of revenge are too much for Pi to deal with, and he finds it easier to imagine a tiger as the killer, rather than himself in that role.
Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Themes

The Will to Live

Life of Pi is a story about struggling to survive through seemingly insurmountable odds. The shipwrecked inhabitants of the little lifeboat don’t simply acquiesce to their fate: they actively fight against it. Pi abandons his lifelong vegetarianism and eats fish to sustain himself. Orange Juice, the peaceful orangutan, fights ferociously against the hyena. Even the severely wounded zebra battles to stay alive; his slow, painful struggle vividly illustrates the sheer strength of his life force. As Martel makes clear in his novel, living creatures will often do extraordinary, unexpected, and sometimes heroic things to survive. However, they will also do shameful and barbaric things if pressed. The hyena’s treachery and the blind Frenchman’s turn toward cannibalism show just how far creatures will go when faced with the possibility of extinction. At the end of the novel, when Pi raises the possibility that the fierce tiger, Richard Parker, is actually an aspect of his own personality, and that Pi himself is responsible for some of the horrific events he has narrated, the reader is forced to decide just what kinds of actions are acceptable in a life-or-death situation.

The Importance of Storytelling

Life of Pi is a story within a story within a story. The novel is framed by a (fictional) note from the author, Yann Martel, who describes how he first came to hear the fantastic tale of Piscine Molitor Patel. Within the framework of Martel’s narration is Pi’s fantastical first-person account of life on the open sea, which forms the bulk of the book. At the end of the novel, a transcript taken from an interrogation of Pi reveals the possible “true” story within that story: that there were no animals at all, and that Pi had spent those 227 days with other human survivors who all eventually perished, leaving only himself.

Pi, however, is not a liar: to him, the various versions of his story each contain a different kind of truth. One version may be factually true, but the other has an emotional or thematic truth that the other cannot approach. Throughout the novel, Pi expresses disdain for rationalists who only put their faith in “dry, yeastless factuality,” when stories—which can amaze and inspire listeners, and are bound to linger longer in the imagination—are, to him, infinitely superior.

Storytelling is also a means of survival. The “true” events of Pi’s sea voyage are too horrible to contemplate directly: any young boy would go insane if faced with the kinds of acts Pi (indirectly) tells his integrators he has witnessed. By recasting his account as an incredible tale about humanlike animals, Pi doesn’t have to face the true cruelty human beings are actually capable of. Similarly, by creating the character of Richard Parker, Pi can disavow the ferocious, violent side of his personality that allowed him to survive on the ocean. Even this is not, technically, a lie in Pi’s eyes. He believes that the tiger-like aspect of his nature and the civilized, human aspect stand in tense opposition and occasional partnership with one another, just as the boy Pi and the tiger Richard Parker are both enemies and allies.

The Nature of Religious Belief

Life of Pi begins with an old man in Pondicherry who tells the narrator, “I have a story that will make you believe in God.” Storytelling and religious belief are two closely linked ideas in the novel. On a literal level, each of Pi’s three religions, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, come with its own set of tales and fables, which are used to spread the teachings and illustrate the beliefs of the faith. Pi enjoys the wealth of stories, but he also senses that, as Father Martin assured him was true of Christianity, each of these stories might simply be aspects of a greater, universal story about love.
Stories and religious beliefs are also linked in *Life of Pi* because Pi asserts that both require faith on the part of the listener or devotee. Surprisingly for such a religious boy, Pi admires atheists. To him, the important thing is to believe in something, and Pi can appreciate an atheist’s ability to believe in the absence of God with no concrete proof of that absence. Pi has nothing but disdain, however, for agnostics, who claim that it is impossible to know either way, and who therefore refrain from making a definitive statement on the question of God. Pi sees this as evidence of a shameful lack of imagination. To him, agnostics who cannot make a leap of faith in either direction are like listeners who cannot appreciate the non-literal truth a fictional story might provide.

**Motifs**

**Territorial Dominance**

Though Martel’s text deals with the seemingly boundless nature of the sea, it also studies the strictness of boundaries, borders, and demarcations. The careful way in which Pi marks off his territory and differentiates it from Richard Parker’s is necessary for Pi’s survival. Animals are territorial creatures, as Pi notes: a family dog, for example, will guard its bed from intruders as if it were a lair. Tigers, as we learn from Richard Parker, are similarly territorial. They mark their space and define its boundaries carefully, establishing absolute dominance over every square inch of their area. To master Richard Parker, Pi must establish his control over certain zones in the lifeboat. He pours his urine over the tarp to designate a portion of the lifeboat as his territory, and he uses his whistle to ensure that Richard Parker stays within his designated space. The small size of the lifeboat and the relatively large size of its inhabitants make for a crowded vessel. In such a confined space, the demarcation of territory ensures a relatively peaceful relationship between man and beast. If Richard Parker is seen as an aspect of Pi’s own personality, the notion that a distinct boundary can be erected between the two represents Pi’s need to disavow the violent, animalistic side of his nature.

**Hunger and Thirst**

Unsurprisingly in a novel about a shipwrecked castaway, the characters in *Life of Pi* are continually fixated on food and water. Ironically, the lifeboat is surrounded by food and water; however, the salty water is undrinkable and the food is difficult to catch. Pi constantly struggles to land a fish or pull a turtle up over the side of the craft, just as he must steadily and consistently collect fresh drinking water using the solar stills. The repeated struggles against hunger and thirst illustrate the sharp difference between Pi’s former life and his current one on the boat. In urban towns such as Pondicherry, people are fed like animals in a zoo—they never have to expend much effort to obtain their sustenance. But on the open ocean, it is up to Pi to fend for himself. His transition from modern civilization to the more primitive existence on the open sea is marked by his attitudes toward fish: initially Pi, a vegetarian, is reluctant to kill and eat an animal. Only once the fish is lifeless, looking as it might in a market, does Pi feel better. As time goes on, Pi’s increasing comfort with eating meat signals his embrace of his new life.

**Ritual**

Throughout the novel, characters achieve comfort through the practice of rituals. Animals are creatures of habit, as Pi establishes early on when he notes that zookeepers can tell if something is wrong with their animals just by noticing changes in their daily routines. People, too, become wedded to their routines, even to the point of predictability, and grow troubled during times of change. While religious traditions are a prime example of ritual in this novel, there are numerous others. For instance, Pi’s mother wants to buy cigarettes before traveling to Canada, for fear that she won’t be able to find her particular brand in Winnipeg. And Pi is able to survive his oceanic ordeal largely because he creates a series of daily rituals to sustain him. Without rituals, routines, and habits, the novel implies, people feel uneasy and unmoored. Rituals give structure to abstract ideas and emotions—in other words, ritual is an alternate form of storytelling.
Symbols

Pi

Piscine Molitor Patel’s preferred moniker is more than just a shortened version of his given name. Indeed, the word Pi carries a host of relevant associations. It is a letter in the Greek alphabet that also contains alpha and omega, terms used in the book to denote dominant and submissive creatures. Pi is also an irrational mathematical number, used to calculate distance in a circle. Often shortened to 3.14, pi has so many decimal places that the human mind can’t accurately comprehend it, just as, the book argues, some realities are too difficult or troubling to face. These associations establish the character Pi as more than just a realistic protagonist; he also is an allegorical figure with multiple layers of meaning.

The Color Orange

In Life of Pi, the color orange symbolizes hope and survival. Just before the scene in which the Tsimtsum sinks, the narrator describes visiting the adult Pi at his home in Canada and meeting his family. Pi’s daughter, Usha, carries an orange cat. This moment assures the reader that the end of the story, if not happy, will not be a complete tragedy, since Pi is guaranteed to survive the catastrophe and father children of his own. The little orange cat recalls the big orange cat, Richard Parker, who helps Pi survive during his 227 days at sea. As the Tsimtum sinks, Chinese crewmen give Pi a lifejacket with an orange whistle; on the boat, he finds an orange lifebuoy. The whistle, buoy, and tiger all help Pi survive, just as Orange Juice the orangutan provides a measure of emotional support that helps the boy maintain hope in the face of horrific tragedy.
Summary and Analysis

Author’s Note

Summary

The brief, italicized section that precedes Part One begins with some background on the book’s author, who has written himself into the text as a character. The author tells us that in 1996, smarting from the less than favorable response to his first two books, he flew to Bombay to rejuvenate his mind. On this, his second trip to India, he arrived with plans to write a novel about Portugal. But that book failed to materialize, and he began to feel hopeless and dejected about his prospects.

In this slightly desperate state, the author says, he left the environs of Bombay and, after a period of wandering, arrived in the town of Pondicherry, in the south of India. Pondicherry had once been controlled by the French Empire but had become self-governing decades ago. In a local coffee shop, the author continues, he met by chance a man named Francis Adirubasamy, who offered to tell him a story. The man told bits and pieces of the story while the author made notes.

Later, back in his native Canada, the author called up the protagonist of Francis Adirubasamy’s story, Mr. Patel (we only know his last name at this point). Mr. Patel agreed to meet with him and tell him his own version of the story, which he did over the course of numerous meetings. He showed the author documents, including his old diary and ancient newspaper clippings about his ordeal. Later, the author received supporting documents from the Japanese Ministry of Transport. The author explains that he decided to write up Mr. Patel’s account using Mr. Patel’s own voice and looking through his eyes. Any mistakes, he states, are the author’s own. The author’s note ends with a series of acknowledgments, most notably to Mr. Patel and to the novelist Moacyr Scliar.

Analysis

Though just six pages long, the Author’s Note clues us into the book’s origins even as it blurs the boundary between fact and fiction. The note claims the text is nonfiction, placing this book squarely in the tradition of picaresque novels like *Don Quixote*, which masquerade as fact even though they are obviously works of imagination. In picaresque novels, the harsh realities of life—poverty, illness, and so on—are subject to wry, ironic, and even humorous treatment. In *Life of Pi*, Martel uses his narrator to make serious commentary on everything from religion to politics, and the mock-journalistic introduction emphasizes the intersection of fact and fiction in his literary world.

The Author’s Note blends facts and fictions about Yann Martel’s own inspiration for the book to illustrate the central theme of the book: storytelling. Martel really had written two not-so-successful books before this one and inspiration had struck him during a visit to India. But did he really meet Francis Adirubasamy in a coffee shop, and does Pi Patel really exist? The answer is no. On one level, Martel is just doing what fiction writers do: creating an imaginary scenario to delight and entice his readers. But on another level, these opening six pages deftly lay the foundation for the novel’s central theme, which is that storytelling is a way to get around telling the boring or upsetting or uninteresting truth. Martel doesn’t want to say that this novel was created by painstakingly researching zoos and religions and oceanic survival guides, getting up early every morning, and writing for several hours a day. Such an explanation would poke a hole in the balloon of fantasy that Pi’s account inflates over the course of the next three hundred pages; so, instead, he invents a different origin story.

The Author’s Note is balanced structurally by Part Three, another short section that is also concerned with creating the impression that this entire book is a work of nonfiction. These bookends do not really fool the reader, of course, but they give us the ability to suspend our disbelief and invest ourselves more fully in the story we are about to read.
Part One (Toronto and Pondicherry): Chapters 1–6

Summary

The main text of the book begins with Pi’s declaration that he has suffered a great deal, leaving him despondent. The nature of his suffering and its source are not yet clear to the reader. Pi tells us that he continued his religious and zoological studies and was a very good student. He mentions that his religious studies thesis addressed aspects of Isaac Luria’s cosmogony theory. He speaks at length about sloths and observes that their very survival is ensured by the fact that they are so slow and dull; they virtually disappear into the background. We learn that Pi is now working, though he does not say anything about his profession. We also learn that Pi misses India and loves Canada, and that he misses someone named Richard Parker.

Pi mentions his stay at a hospital in Mexico, where he was treated exceptionally well. He lists his ailments—anemia, fluid retention, dark urine, broken skin—and says that he was up and walking in about a week’s time. He tells us he fainted the first time he turned on a water tap and heard the water rushing forth and describes how he felt wounded when a waiter in an Indian restaurant in Canada criticized him for using his fingers to eat.

The narrative briefly switches to the author’s point of view. The author describes Pi as a small, gray-haired, middle-aged man, who talks quickly and directly.

Pi’s narrative resumes, as he reflects on his boyhood in India. Pi relates that he was named after a pool. His parents did not like water, but he learned to swim from a family friend, Francis Adirubasamy, whom Pi calls Mamaji. Mamaji was a champion swimmer when he was young, and he instills in Pi a love for the ritualistic nature of swimming, stroke after stroke. Mamaji’s favorite pool in the world is the Piscine Molitor in Paris, and it is after that pool that Pi received his unusual name.

Pi’s father, Santosh Patel, used to run the Pondicherry Zoo, and Pi explains that he grew up thinking the zoo was paradise. He discusses the ritualistic habits of zoo creatures. Pi remembers the alarm-clock precision of the roaring lions and the howler monkeys, the songs that are birds’ daily rites, the hours of day at which various animals could be counted on to entertain him. He defends zoos against those who would rather the animals were kept in the wild. He argues that wild creatures are at the mercy of nature, while zoo creatures live a life of luxury and constancy. Pi tells us that the Pondicherry Zoo is now shut down and that many people now hold both zoos and religions in disrepute.

Pi describes the teasing he received as a child because of his full name, Piscine, which the other school children turned into Pissing, and how he trained his classmates and teachers to call him Pi by writing it on the chalkboard of each of his classrooms. Then we switch briefly back to the voice of the author, who tells us that Pi’s kitchen in Canada is extremely well-stocked.

Analysis

At this early point in Martel’s novel, we have seen hints that Pi has endured something devastating and extraordinary, but we don’t know exactly what. The book approaches that nameless event from the outside in, providing information about Pi’s life before and after before getting to the heart of the tragedy itself. This technique builds up the suspense and allows us to get to know Pi as a normal boy and a fully fleshed out character, not just as a victim of circumstance. It also draws us firmly into the story: we want to know who Richard Parker is and what happened to him, and we wonder about Pi’s memories of India.

Though given only a brief mention, Pi’s reference of his thesis on sixteenth-century Kabbalist Isaac Luria’s cosmogony theory is very important to the book as a whole. In essence, Luria’s theory of creation states that God contracted to make room for the universe. This contraction, called Tsimstum, was followed by light, carried in five vessels. The vessels shattered, causing the sparks of light to sink into matter. God reordered them into five figures, which became the dimensions of our created reality. This seemingly unimportant detail actually foreshadows the main event to come: the sinking of the ship, the Tsimstum, which gives Pi the room to create his own version of the events that follow. Interestingly, like the five figures that make up reality for Luria, five characters on the lifeboat (including Pi himself) shape Pi’s story.

The zoo occupies an important place in Pi’s memory. Indeed, growing up in a zoo shaped his belief system, taught him about animal nature, and imbued in him many significant lessons about the meaning of freedom.
Zoos are places of habit: there are chores that the keepers must perform every day, such as feeding and cleaning the animals and their cages, as well as animal rituals. Pi establishes early on the orderliness of the zoo and the comforting sense of regularity it gives him. Animals prefer the consistency of zoo life just as humans accustom themselves to the rituals and abundance of modern society, their own sort of zoo. Zoo animals rarely run away, even if given the opportunity, and they enjoy the abundant water and food. In the wild, by contrast, life is a constant battle for survival, a race against the odds and other creatures. Death is a constant presence and possibility. All of us living in modern society are essentially zoo creatures, defanged and protected from the wilderness waiting for us beyond the enclosure walls, walls from which Pi will soon be freed.

Explanations of Pi’s name take up nearly as much text as his philosophizing about zoos. The watery associations of Piscine Molitor’s full name are undeniable: *piscine* not only means “pool” in French but shares a derivation with *pisces*, or *fish*. As befits his name, Pi learns how to swim from Francis Adirubasamy, and he gravitates toward water. His full name performs two related and yet antithetical functions in the text: first, it emphasizes the idea that a very strong swimmer like Pi might realistically have survived in the ocean after a shipwreck; and second, it is such an odd name that is has the ring of allegory, positioning Pi as a mythic or fabled character. The literal, mathematical symbol pi, an almost impossibly long number whose combinations never repeat, also symbolizes Pi’s long journey, with all its variations.

Given the amount of energy that Pi devotes to the ideas of rituals and routine in the lives of zoo creatures, it is telling that he uses repetition to train his schoolmates and teachers into calling him Pi. One day at school, he leaps up during roll call and writes his full name on the blackboard; then he underlines his preferred nickname, Pi, and speaks it aloud. He carries out this act in each classroom, during every roll call, to the point where his fellow students start to follow along. For humans as well as animals, repetition proves to be a very effective teacher.

**Part One: Chapters 7–20**

**Summary**

We return to Pi’s Pondicherry narrative, and he remembers his favorite teacher, Mr. Satish Kumar. Mr. Kumar is an atheist communist with whom Pi feels a deep kinship. In fact, Pi says, atheists are simply people of a different faith, with strong beliefs. It is agnostics, full of doubt and uncertainty and devoid of faith, whom Pi cannot stomach.

Pi describes in vivid detail the day his father fed a live goat to a caged tiger to teach Pi and his brother, Ravi, about the danger posed by wild animals. But, according to a sign in the zoo, the most dangerous animal of all is man. Piscine explains flight distance—the minimum distance at which an animal will tolerate a potential predator or enemy. Getting animals used to the presence of humans, he continues, is the key to the smooth running of a zoo and may be accomplished by creating a good enclosure, providing food and water, and knowing each animal well. Taken care of in this way, zoo animals rarely if ever run back to the wild. On the exceptional occasions when they do, it is usually because someone or something has invaded their territory and frightened them away.

Pi discusses territoriality at greater length, explaining that animals are fiercely defensive of their particular area. They also respect the territory of other creatures, which is why lion tamers enter the cage first, establishing their dominance before the lions are brought in. Pi shifts into an explanation of why socially inferior animals—omega animals—tend to be the most obedient, loyal, and faithful to their masters. They have the most to gain from a good relationship with an alpha creature.

The author reasserts his voice and describes the Patel house in Canada, which is full of various religious iconography. He sees Hindu, Christian, and Islamic paintings, statues, devotional articles, photographs, clothes, and books. Pi keeps the Bible on his nightstand.

Pi says he was born into Hinduism, becoming involved in its rites and rituals as an infant. He describes his constant hunger for Prasad, a Hindu offering to God, and the way his hands automatically move into prayer position. He discusses the Hindu philosophy of life, which he embraces: “That which sustains the universe beyond thought and language, and that which is at the core of us and struggles for expression, is the same thing.” Pi states that he has always been and will always be a Hindu.
Pi describes how, one day on holiday, when he was fourteen, he came across a church and, although he had never been in one before, stepped across the threshold. Inside, Father Martin told him the story of Christ on the cross, which Pi found very strange. When he asked to hear another story, Father Martin responded that Christianity has only one story, and the crux of it is love. Soon after, Pi decided to become a Christian; Father Martin told him he already was.

Pi then explains how he became a Muslim at age fifteen. It began when Pi met a Muslim baker and mystic, a second Mr. Satish Kumar, who, in the middle of a conversation with Pi, excused himself to pray. Pi watched the routine and returned later to ask the baker about his religion; the baker explained that Islam is about the Beloved. Pi began to pray with Mr. Kumar and to visit a local mosque.

**Analysis**

From the animalistic rites and rituals of the earlier zoo section of the novel, the novel has transitioned into a section about religious rites and rituals. In these chapters we witness, through Pi’s eyes, many examples of pious routine, from Christian church-going to Muslim prayer and chanting. We also see the objects that lend comfort to the faithful on a daily basis: paintings of religious figures, like Christ on the cross or of Lord Ganesha, and devotional articles such as sticks of incense and a copper spoon. A central message of the book is becoming clearer and clearer: religion is a method humans have developed of making their lives more pleasurable, more meaningful, and more understandable.

But lest the reader interpret Pi’s focus on rites and objects as merely superficial, Pi lets us know that he understands there is more to faith than ritual. He is well aware that without something bigger and more significant, a religious custom is a hollow act. He says as much when he calls the miracles of Jesus Christ “minor magic, on the order of card tricks,” and Muslim prayer “hot-weather yoga for the Bedouins.” These slights come before he has gained a true understanding of and appreciation for the heart and soul of each religious faith, and once he embraces the essence of each religion, he embraces their rituals with enthusiasm as well.

As is made abundantly apparent throughout the text, both Martel and Pi are fascinated in particular by the intersection of zoology and religion. Pi studies both subjects at college, and chapters on zoology are interspersed throughout Part One with chapters on religion and philosophy. Pi makes multiple references to the ways in which zoos are like religion—both are in people’s bad graces these days, he says at one point, because of prevailing notions about freedom. In other words, people sometimes resist what they perceive as constraints on their liberty. Religion, with its many dictates and rules, may be seen as intrusions on personal freedoms. But Pi defends religion the same way he defends zoos earlier in the book, by examining the very definition of freedom and imagining what life would be like without religion. Life inside the walls, as it were, is cozy and comfortable, and people prefer not to leave; life outside is bleak by comparison.

Tucked between these chapters on Hindu, Christianity, and Islam and the earlier chapter on the atheist Mr. Kumar, of whom Pi is extremely fond, falls the section on the ferocity of tigers and the intense territoriality of animals. The placement of this chapter might seem odd, but in fact it is very relevant to its neighboring scenes. Pi’s father allows a tiger to attack a goat in front of his two sons to teach them to never get too close to the tiger cage. Wild animals, even if they’ve been domesticated and trained, are still wild animals at heart. Their intrinsic nature is deep-seated and always ready to boil up to the surface.

The dramatic violence of the tiger-and-goat chapter leads naturally to Pi’s declaration that he once believed that Christianity was about great violence, and Islam about even greater violence. Martel establishes a vague and yet undeniable connection here between the feral acts of wild creatures and the sadistic brutality that humans have inflicted upon humans for centuries, often because of religious conflicts. Pi soon comes to see that Christianity and Islam are, in fact, about love rather than hatred or violence. But he remains puzzled by certain religious tenets that seem to go against the foundation of love, such as God’s decree that Christ be punished for man’s sins. Pi senses this ominous and mysterious aspect of religion even as he embraces God in all his guises.
Part One: Chapters 21–36

Summary

The author sits in a café after a meeting with Pi and thinks about what he has just heard. He considers his own mundane life and writes down some thoughts about Pi’s religious philosophies. We switch back to Pi’s narration. Pi describes the final deathbed moments of an atheist, who he imagines would take a “leap of faith” at the last minute. Then he describes the tiresome rationalizing of an agnostic, who on his deathbed would try to present a reasonable explanation for the white light rather than letting his imagination supply him with a “better story.”

One day, Pi tells us, he and his parents were out enjoying the weather at a seaside esplanade when the priest, imam, and pandit with whom Pi had been practicing his various religions approached them. Each was shocked to discover that Pi was not just a Hindu, Christian, or Muslim, but rather all three simultaneously. Pi’s parents were also surprised to learn Pi’s secret. The religious figures protested that such a thing was not possible and demanded that Pi choose a single religion. Pi responded that he just wanted to love God. Pi says his brother, Ravi, teased him mercilessly for some time afterward. Pi speculates that people who act out in violence or anger in the name of god misunderstand the true nature of religion.

Pi describes asking his father and mother for a prayer mat, a request that flustered both of them. His mother attempted to distract him with books: Robinson Crusoe and a volume by Robert Louis Stevenson. Finally, however, they gave in, and Pi came to treasure his rug. He used to pray in his yard, with his parents and brother watching him like an exotic creature. Not long after he got his rug, he continues, he was baptized in the presence of his parents.

Pi explains that the 1970s were a difficult time in India, though he admits that political troubles did not really affect him. His father, though, became incensed over the government’s actions and decided to move his family to Canada—a place completely foreign to Pi and Ravi.

We return to the author’s first person. The author describes meeting Meena Patel, Pi’s wife, whose existence first comes as a shock to him. Once he knew about her, the author began to see signs of her all over Pi’s house; until that point he had not noticed any because he had not been looking for them. He wonders if Meena is the one who has been cooking spicy food for him, but confirms that the cook is indeed Pi himself.

Pi narrates the one-time meeting of the two Mr. Kumars, the atheist biology teacher and the Muslim baker. One day they joined Pi for an outing at the Pondicherry Zoo, during which Pi introduced them to a Grant’s zebra. Neither had ever seen an exotic zebra before, but both were in awe of the splendid creature. Pi segues into a discussion of zoomorphism: when an animal sees another animal, or even another human, as being of its own kind. Pi says these animals know the truth—the lion cubs know the dog is not their mother, and the lions know the human is a human, not a lion—but they embrace the fiction because they are also in need of stories to get through life.

In preparation for the move to Canada, Pi says, Mr. Patel sold off many zoo creatures and made arrangements to bring some of them across the Pacific in a cargo ship with the family. Pi describes setting sail on June 21, 1977, and being very excited. He mentions his mother’s apprehension about leaving the place she has lived all her life to travel into the unknown.

The author, again in first person, meets Pi’s two children: Nikhil and Usha. Usha, age four, is holding an orange cat in her arms. The author says Pi’s story has a happy ending.

Analysis

This section begins with two of the most important phrases in the entire text: “dry, yeastless factuality” and “the better story.” Both come to the author directly from Pi, and their significance is underscored by the fact that they are repeated within two pages. The two phrases are opposite poles on the spectrum of storytelling. At one end is boring reality, which is as flat as unrisen bread. At the other end is a version of reality that has been enlivened by imagination, improving the story—it becomes a full, hearty, risen loaf of bread, so to speak. When the options are presented in these terms, it is easy to see which is the more tempting. The risen bread is far more appetizing, while the flattened, yeastless option looks about as appealing to eat as cardboard.
The compulsion to invent a better story, to improve one’s reality and make it more livable, is such a deep-seated and natural instinct, Pi says, that even animals do it, whether unconsciously or not. For example, a lion doesn’t think a human is really a lion. But given the right conditions and the appropriate circumstance, a lion may become willing to accept the human as one of its own. Faced either with life as an orphan or life with a foster mother, what lion cub wouldn’t accept a dog as a maternal figure? The fiction improves his life immeasurably.

Pi strongly recognizes the saving grace of a myth or story to enrich “yeastless” factuality, and he knows that believing in a story requires a leap of faith. This is precisely why he is so perturbed by the idea of agnosticism, which in this section comes up for the second time in the novel. Agnostics, as Pi explains it, are rational to a fault. They do not trust anything that they cannot see, taste, or experience. They are wedded to factuality—indeed, they prefer it—and that is the main reason why Pi feels such a strong distaste for them. They are completely unwilling to take an imaginative leap, in either direction.

Pi’s inclination toward spicy, robust cooking is a strong metaphor for his storytelling abilities. The dichotomy between yeastless, dry bread and fluffy, enriched bread is amplified by the fact that, as the author tells us, Pi is a good cook, one who uses abundant spices—so much so that the author sweats and even has digestive trouble when he eats Pi’s food. Pi also seems to take great pleasure in adding condiments (relishes, chutneys, and so on) to the table. Pi’s story, which we are about to get to in Part Two, is one in which he has added yeast, spices, herbs, and anything else he can to make it palatable; apparently the facts alone would be hard to swallow.

That additive quality—of heaping layers on layers, spices on spices—also helps explain why Pi practices multiple religions simultaneously. As we see during the confrontation with the priest, pandit, and imam, normal born-and-raised Hindus do not adopt two additional faiths. However, something in Pi drives him to need more stories, more versions of reality, more options. Each faith brings with it its own unique myths and fables, its own assortment of rituals and customs, and its own take on God. Pi explains that the essence of every religion is love, and by practicing multiple religions at once he is able to surround himself in layers of affection, acceptance, understanding, and affirmation.

The similarities between Pi and Robinson Crusoe, which the Pi’s mother gives him in this section, are also striking. Like Pi, Crusoe is shipwrecked. Both characters keep journals of their daily activities, develop survival skills, and train animals. As time goes on, both fall ill and hallucinate and encounter cannibals on an island. However, though the activities of both men are quite similar, the differences in their characters are great. Whereas Crusoe seems incapable of deep feelings, Pi embraces them, ricocheting from the deepest levels of sorrow at the loss of his family and his difficult situation to great heights of joy at the thoughts of rescue, food, and God. Though Pi tries to train his classmates to pronounce his name correctly, his dominance extends primarily over Richard Parker. Crusoe takes this mastery one step further and enters into a master-slave relationship with Friday, a victim of the cannibals whom he rescues. Pi is ultimately the more appealing protagonist, a product of modern times, connected to and caring about the world and others in a way that Crusoe never does.

**Part Two (The Pacific Ocean): Chapters 37–42**

**Summary**

The ship sinks, and Pi finds himself in a lifeboat in the midst of utter chaos. He sees a Royal Bengal tiger named Richard Parker in the water, near drowning, and urges him to save himself. Richard Parker boards the lifeboat and suddenly Pi realizes the danger in sharing a tiny space with a vicious animal. He throws himself into the roiling water.

The narrative moves back a few moments to the point just before the sinking of the Tsimtsum. Pi is sleeping when a loud noise, perhaps an explosion, wakes him. He tries to wake Ravi so they can go exploring together, but Ravi stays asleep. Pi passes his parents’ cabin door and climbs up to the main deck, where he sees that it is raining. The boat is listing considerably to one side and making awful groaning noises; Pi begins to feel afraid. He tries to run back down to the level of the ship where his family is, but the stairwell is full of water.
Pi goes back up to the main deck, where he hears animals shrieking. Three Chinese crewmen put a life jacket on him and throw him over the side of the ship. He falls forty feet through the air before landing on a tarpaulin partially covering a lifeboat hanging from the ship’s side. A Grant’s zebra jumps into the lifeboat after him, smashing down onto a bench. The lifeboat falls into the water.

The narrative moves forward again to the moment just after Pi jumps from the lifeboat into the water to escape Richard Parker. A shark cuts through the water nearby and Pi is terrified. He looks into the boat but sees only the zebra, not the tiger. He slips back into the water but sees another shark and quickly hoists himself up onto an oar hanging off the edge of the ship. He dangles a few feet above the water, holding on for dear life.

The ship continues to sink until it disappears. There are no other survivors, as far as Pi can tell. After some time passes, Pi decides that he needs to change position to prevent further soreness and help him spot other lifeboats. He climbs up onto the lifeboat’s tarpaulin cover, under which he believes Richard Parker is hiding. Pi is frightened, expecting the tiger to appear and attack him at any moment. But, the tiger stays hidden. Pi notices that the zebra is still alive but has a severely broken back leg.

A hyena appears and Pi rationalizes that Richard Parker must have drowned, for a tiger and hyena could not both be on the lifeboat at the same time. Pi realizes that the crew members must have thrown him into the lifeboat as bait for the hyena, hoping to clear the lifeboat for themselves. Pi is fearful of the hyena but decides that the upfront aggression of a dog is preferable to the slyness and stealth of a jungle cat.

An orangutan named Orange Juice, once a star animal at the Pondicherry Zoo and the mother of two male orangutans, floats up to the lifeboat on a raft of bananas tangled up in a net. She boards the lifeboat, seemingly in shock. Pi saves the net but the bananas sink.

**Analysis**

Perhaps the strongest message of this section is the fierce, unrelenting power with which life will fight to stave off death. Again and again in the aftermath of the ship’s sinking, we bear witness to close calls and near-fatal incidents, and yet life continually surprises us with its might and will power. Pi survives his forty-foot fall through the air and lands unharmed on the lifeboat’s spongy tarpaulin cover. The zebra survives a much less graceful fall and a broken leg. Richard Parker, in a state of shock and panic, swims through turbulent ocean waters to clamber aboard a lifeboat. And Orange Juice, having somehow evaded the ocean’s gravity and the suction of the sinking ship, magically appears out of nowhere to join this group of survivors. In retrospect, Pi says, “Had I considered my prospects in light of reason, I surely would have given up and let go of the oar, hoping that I might drown before being eaten.” But the sheer will to live outweighs logical thought, and so he clings to the oar, and to life.

This vitality is drawn in stark contrast to the loss of lives—both human and animal—that the Tsimtsum’s sinking caused. The appearance of Orange Juice is particularly moving, since she is the most humanlike of all the creatures that manage to board the lifeboat; her presence emphasizes the loss of human life. Moreover, she is a maternal figure. Pi tells us that she gave birth to two boys at the Pondicherry Zoo, and the parallel between Orange Juice and Mrs. Patel (who also has two sons, Pi and Ravi) is striking.

Taken another way, Pi’s untenable position could be interpreted as the turning point in an adolescent boy’s life, when he must navigate the rough waters between the security of family life and the independence of adulthood. Certainly there is a great deal of material in Part One about the difficulty of growing up, the teasing from childhood friends, and the existential questioning of early adolescence. Just before the sinking of the Tsimtsum, Pi hesitates and then walks past his parents’ cabin door, a hint at his desire to become independent. But the loss of his family leaves him inconsolable and unsure of what to do. However, life goes on, with muscle aches to match emotional pain, and he must figure out how to fend for himself in a lonely, confusing, and even violent world.
Part Two: Chapters 43–47

Summary

Pi imagines that the alert has gone out about the sinking of the Tsimtsum and that help is on the way. The hyena whines, but the animals are otherwise quiet. Pi tries to make his spot on the tarpaulin as safe as possible, throwing the net over the middle, but there is almost no barrier between him and the animals. The hyena begins to act strangely, jumping up onto a bench and looking into the water, then racing around the zebra over and over again. Finally the hyena vomits and nestles into a small space just behind the zebra, where it remains for a time. The zebra remains silent.

Daylight begins to fade and Pi contemplates the coming night with horror. In the dark, a rescue ship won’t be able to spot him, and the animals might attack him. Night falls. It is cloudy and there is no moon, so the darkness is complete. Pi hears snarls coming from the hyena and barks from the zebra, as well as “wet mouth sounds.” Still, the animals do not come near him. He hears sounds from under the boat and notes that the animals in the water are also battling for life.

After that first full night in the lifeboat, the sun rises, and Pi’s thoughts turn to rescue and seeing his family again. But when he looks into the lifeboat, he sees an appalling sight: the hyena has bitten off the zebra’s broken leg and is eating it. The zebra is alive, still silent but grinding its teeth.

Pi feels queasy. He sees Orange Juice near the boat’s gunnel, panting with seasickness, and laughs at the orangutan’s humanlike demeanor. She looks out at the water. Upon reflection, he finds it strange that Orange Juice remains unhurt by the hyena. Pi fantasizes about a zoo enclosure in which orangutans and hyenas live together peacefully and contentedly. A sea turtle bumps against the hull of the boat; Pi tells it to go find help, and the turtle slips back down into the sea.

Pi notices that the water around the boat is full of mako sharks and other fish. Orange Juice sits up and looks around at the open water; Pi realizes she is looking for her two sons the same way that Pi has been searching the horizon for his family. Pi is devastated.

Suddenly the hyena attacks the zebra, pulling off a large expanse of its hide and then sliding headfirst into its side, eating it alive from the inside. Orange Juice roars in protest and the hyena howls back. The two animals engage in a fierce standoff while the zebra fades. Some blood falls over the side of the boat, and sharks begin to circle and bump the hull. Pi fears that they will break the boat, causing it to sink, but soon the standoff between the hyena and orangutan ends, and the sharks swim away. Horrified and scared, Pi admits to himself that his family has likely perished. As he sinks deeper into his grief, the hyena continues to eat.

The zebra finally dies later the next day. Afterward, the hyena attacks Orange Juice. The orangutan puts up a fight, thumping the hyena on the head and impressing Pi with her savagery, but she is no match for the hyena, who decapitates her. Pi cries and goes to the edge of the tarpaulin, ready to throw himself to the hyena, when he sees Richard Parker’s head under the bench. He goes back to the bow and falls into a delirious sleep.

Analysis

Pi’s true education in nature’s savagery begins in this gruesome section. In Part One, Mr. Patel teaches Ravi and Pi about animal nature and its violent tendencies, but it is not until he finds himself in a lifeboat with a zebra, hyena, orangutan, and tiger that Pi truly understands the vicious behavior of wild animals in close quarters. Somewhat naive, Pi is stunned by much of what he sees—for example, when the hyena eats the zebra’s leg and when the gentle orangutan acts out violently to protect herself from the hyena.

The brutality of the animals teaches Pi another lesson: the qualities a human or animal exhibit when unprovoked can vary radically from those that same human or animal will show if attacked or threatened. He is astonished when Orange Juice, a maternal creature that grew up at the Pondicherry Zoo, strikes the hyena with a powerful blow. Pi has never before seen her make any outward displays of aggression; he had assumed her nature was sweet and her disposition even and benevolent. The strike Orange Juice gives the hyena is like a slap in the face to Pi: suddenly he realizes that personality is something separate and distinct from instinct.

Equally surprising to Pi is the fact that life continues in the face of unimaginable pain. The clearest and most obvious example of this is the poor zebra, whose slow death takes place over the course of days. To live in such physical misery is horrifying to Pi. To the reader, however, Pi himself stands as a clear example of heroic
endurance. Pi’s body is unharmed, but his emotional and spiritual anguish is intense. He says that his second night in the lifeboat was one of the worst of his life. Yet, in the face of great mental anguish, he endures. Alone and grief stricken without his family or any other human survivors, Pi finds both solace and sadness in the presence of Orange Juice. He notes that Orange Juice seems to be having some very human reactions to her predicament: she looks queasy and seasick, holding herself up at the edge of the lifeboat like a nauseated person might. More significantly, she looks out at the open water in a way that Pi instantly recognizes as both hopeful (awaiting the appearance of her two sons) and hopeless (not really expected them to appear after all). Though comforted by Orange Juice’s humanlike demeanor, Pi is also saddened by their common bond—their loss of family.

**Part Two: Chapters 48–57**

**Summary**

Pi tells the story of Richard Parker’s capture. A panther had been killing people near Bangladesh, and a professional hunter was called in to try to capture it. Leaving a goat as bait, the hunter instead attracted two tigers, a mother and her cub. The hunter sedated the mother and picked up the cub, sending them both off to the Pondicherry Zoo. In the accompanying paperwork, the name of the hunter who had picked up the cub, Richard Parker, gets mixed up with the name of the cub, Thirsty. The mix-up so amuses Mr. Patel that he decides to call the tiger cub Richard Parker.

Back on the lifeboat, Pi is so certain the tiger will kill him that he actually cheers up a bit. There’s nothing he can do now. Suddenly he is overcome by thirst and explores the lifeboat looking for water. He observes the details of the boat: its benches and oarlocks, its bright orange color, its dimensions—twenty-six feet long and eight feet wide. Pi discovers a locker containing emergency supplies under the end of the lifeboat under the tarpaulin, where Richard Parker has his “den.” Carefully, he opens the locker and assesses the contents, greedily drinking some canned water and eagerly eating emergency rations. He tallies his supplies: he has 31 cartons of rations and 124 cans of water, among other survival items.

Pi decides that to survive with Richard Parker as a companion he needs to build a raft to put some distance between himself and the tiger. He creates a raft using oars, a lifebuoy, and life jackets, then tethers it to the lifeboat. As he is doing so, the hyena starts whining and Richard Parker begins to growl. The tiger kills the hyena, who dies without a whimper. Richard Parker turns around and starts to approach Pi but gets distracted by the rolling of the boat and the bounciness of the tarpaulin. At that moment, a rat appears and runs up onto Pi’s head. Pi grabs and throws the rat at Richard Parker, who devours it, giving Pi just enough time to escape into his raft.

The raft proves seaworthy, but Pi knows he is floating just above a vast ocean, with sharks all around. Rain falls and Pi uses a rain catcher to trap fresh water for drinking. He continually checks the knots in the ropes holding together the parts of the raft. Unable to sleep, he entertains fanciful ways of killing Richard Parker. Finally Pi decides to wait for the tiger to run out of water and starve. The next day he realizes the flaws in his plan: Bengal tigers can swim and drink saline water. If Richard Parker gets hungry, he will jump into the ocean and swim out to Pi. If he gets thirsty, he will drink seawater.

For now, though, Richard Parker is sated, having drunk rainwater and feasted on the hyena. While looking at Pi, he makes an unusual noise that sounds like *prusten*. Pi recognizes it as the rare sound tigers use to express harmless intentions. At this moment, Pi decides to try to tame Richard Parker. He uses a whistle on one of the lifejackets as a whip and shouts across the water to prove his alpha status. Richard Parker intensely dislikes the sound of the whistle and lies down in the bottom of the lifeboat.

**Analysis**

Fear takes numerous forms in the text, but its very omnipresence eventually reduces its power over Pi. As a narrator, Pi is terribly self-aware, and he recognizes and even catalogs some of the gradations of anxiety he feels from minute to minute: the blind terror he feels when he jumps into the ocean only to see a shark fin slice through the water; the defensive panic that comes from facing down a carnivorous, hungry hyena; his dread over his family’s fate. Pi’s enormous and all-encompassing fear of Richard Parker has an odd expression: it
makes him feel a little better. With Richard Parker aboard the boat, death is inevitable, not just a possibility. Because of this fact, Pi can stop worrying about what might happen; he can instead be comforted by knowing what will happen, regardless of how horrible that fate is. Accepting his own death makes his fear less paralyzing and enables him to take action.

Pi’s fear is tempered somewhat by Richard Parker’s unexpected and welcome snort of prusten, a tiger’s way of stating that his intentions are benevolent. Rather than demonstrating his pure animalistic brute strength, Richard Parker does a quasi-human thing: he indicates a willingness to negotiate. This occurrence more than any other equips Pi with the courage to begin training the tiger. While Pi’s early inclination is to run as far away from Richard Parker as he can—as far as the lifeline between the lifeboat and raft will allow—the tiger’s affable snort brings him back. He begins to reconsider boarding the lifeboat and not confining himself to his raft.

This movement of Pi and Richard Parker toward one another, the literal lessening of physical distance, underscores a message that Martel will amplify over the course of the novel: animals and humans aren’t such different creatures after all. Earlier in the novel Pi says that omega animals (such as Richard Parker) will often be obedient to a human trainer in an effort to climb up the social hierarchy, tolerating what they perceive as the human alpha creature’s odd demands. In essence, they mimic human behavior in the same way that Pi, out of respect for Richard Parker, mimics the tiger. It is significant, too, that the tiger bears a man’s name, while Pi could be a shortened form of the word pisces, or fish. Martel has built zoomorphic ambiguity right into their names, pointing out quite strongly the gray area between humanity and animal nature.

**Part Two: Chapters 58–62**

**Summary**

Pi dries off and reads the survivor manual he has found in the lifeboat locker. He realizes that he needs to fish and create a shelter from the elements. Thirsty and hungry, he decides to go back to the lifeboat. He pulls up in the raft, cautiously, and sees that Richard Parker has marked his territory by spraying urine across the bottom of the boat. Pi drinks water from a puddle on the boat and urinates on the locker lid and tarpaulin, marking his own territory.

Next, Pi discovers twelve solar stills—devices that transform salt water into fresh water through a process of evaporation—and sets them up in the water. He then makes improvements to his raft. He carves an oar and turns it into a mast, hangs a blanket as a canopy, and adds a life vest to the floor of the raft. Pi enjoys a dinner of rations in the raft, and Richard Parkers looks on from the lifeboat, making the prusten sound once more. Pi looks down at the ocean and sees that it is full of life in many forms.

Pi tries to fish using a leather shoe as bait, but it doesn’t work very well. He climbs aboard the lifeboat in search of better bait, only to be interrupted by a school of flying fish from the ocean. Some hit Pi and Richard Parker; some fall into the boat; some jump over the hull and fly clear to the other side and back into the water. Richard Parker eats his fill and Pi sets out to kill one himself. A lifelong vegetarian and pacifist, Pi hesitates and then cries when he finally breaks the fish’s neck with his hands.

Later, Pi manages to land a three-foot-long dorado, which he kills and feeds to Richard Parker. He has come to terms with the necessity of killing his food to stay alive. Having fed himself and Richard Parker, Pi checks the solar stills, not believing they will actually have worked to produce fresh water. In fact, they have, and Pi drinks heartily from one of the twelve stills. He empties the rest into a bucket for Richard Parker. As the day ends, Pi realizes it has been a week since the ship sunk.

**Analysis**

Although manmade tools make survival easier, Pi remains reliant on nature. The survival items Pi finds in the lifeboat, in particular the solar stills, help Pi quench his thirst, though he still struggles in feeding himself and Richard Parker. Pi’s first attempt at fishing is a decided failure; the rudimentary hook and bait he puts together don’t quite do the trick. A fluke of nature—the sudden appearance of a school of flying fish—results in his first catch. The juxtaposition of the solar stills and the fish that literally jump right into Pi’s lifeboat
seems to be Martel’s way of saying that man cannot completely separate himself from and be independent of nature.

Martel begins to lower Pi’s humanity a notch, bringing him closer and closer to an animal’s existence. Pi’s behavior starts to mimic Richard Parker’s: he uses his urine to delineate his territory and acts furtive and stealthy. Imitation is a method of self-preservation: adapting to the behavior of his wild companion keeps him relatively safe. But even as Pi descends bit by bit into his innate feralness, his humanity resists. He considers drinking his urine (as the hyena would have done) but does not, and he hesitates before killing the flying fish—certainly a different response from Richard Parker’s. The strict demarcation between human civility and animal behavior blurs under these circumstances, but it is not completely lost.

**Part Two: Chapters 63–80**

**Summary**

Pi, looking back at his ordeal, says he spent 227 days as a castaway at sea.

Back on the raft and lifeboat, Pi busies himself with tasks. His daily schedule consists of chores and activities; he feeds himself and Richard Parker, keeps the vessels clean and functioning smoothly, and stimulates his mind (prayers, writing, and rest). Of the many weeks and months at sea, Pi says he survived only because he managed to forget the very notion of time.

Pi’s clothes disintegrate over time, and the near-constant wetness causes sea boils. Pi reads the survival manual, trying to understand its mysterious clues about navigation, but he is at a loss. He continues to fish, grabbing the fish with his bare hands and chopping their heads off with hatchets. He learns to train a net in the water as a lure, and some days he catches more fish than he can eat. He also learns that turtles are a relatively easy catch. Pi spends many hours observing the sea life collecting on the underside of his raft and eating some of it. He describes the cuminlike smell of signal flares, which never succeed in eliciting a response from rescuers.

Pi butchers a small hawksbill turtle and drinks its blood, which the survival manual recommends as a nutritious and salt-free thirst quencher. Because the turtle is too unwieldy for the raft, Pi must do this butchery on the lifeboat tarpaulin. He decides he needs to train Richard Parker to allow him onto the lifeboat more regularly.

Pi presents a training manual for taming a wild creature in a lifeboat at sea. He then describes his training attempts, during which he goads Richard Parker by stomping on the middle bench of the boat and blowing the whistle. He uses a turtle shell for a shield. During the first training practice, Richard Parker knocks Pi into the water, but Pi persists. Each practice, he catches another turtle and fashions a new shield. Finally, by the fifth shield, he is able to send Richard Parker back into the bottom of the boat by blowing on the whistle and rocking the boat to induce nausea in the tiger.

Pi keeps a diary, writing down mostly practical observations, and carries out religious rituals adapted to his unique situation. He also cleans up after Richard Parker, as part of the training exercise. After Richard Parker defecates (once a month—like Pi, he is constipated from dehydration and a high-protein diet), Pi holds the feces in his hand and blows the whistle angrily to demonstrate dominance. It works: Richard Parker gets nervous. In a moment of supreme hunger, Pi tries to eat the tiger’s feces, but fails.

Pi catches a four-foot mako shark with his bare hands and throws it to Richard Parker, who clubs it with his paw and accidentally gets bitten. Pi takes this as a reminder that the tiger is not perfect. One day, a dorado leaps onto the lifeboat and Pi grabs hold of it. Richard Parker sees the fish and gets into an attack crouch. Pi stares Richard Parker down until he backs away, then throws him a portion of his catch. Pi notes with some disappointment that he has begun wolfing his food down like an animal.

**Analysis**

The repetition of activities necessary for life proves distressing for Pi. Biology dictates that animals (humans included) perform the same few essential acts again and again: eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, sleeping, and so on. In ordinary life, such repetition can be comforting. But in the context of a lifeboat in the Pacific, where food and water and everything else are scarce and normalcy has gone out the window, repetition is a
curse, a threat. Because there is no regular source of water, the compulsion to drink water every day is a nui-
sance. Because Pi must wear the same clothes every day, they disintegrate and fall off his body.

The regularity of events on the lifeboat is reminiscent of the habits of animals in the wild or in a zoo, which
Pi has remarked on at length earlier in the book. Indeed, the lifeboat itself becomes a sort of zoo enclosure,
and the tethered raft serves as a cage, protecting zookeeper from wild creature. Pi feeds Richard Parker just
the way a zookeeper would, cleaning up after him in a similar fashion. The entire setup is familiar—clearly,
Pi has learned well from his father. Pi follows in Mr. Patel’s footsteps, letting reason and faith in himself to
serve as his guides.

New activities lighten the monotony of Pi’s daily life, though they are quickly absorbed into routine. Each
“first” in the lifeboat or on the raft is treated in the account with detail and great passion. However, and inev-
itably, those firsts quickly meld into a monotonous series of repetitions that dull the senses. The first time Pi
kills a fish, we are held in thrall as he hesitates and frets over the act. But as soon as it is over, it is as though a
spell has broken: Pi is now free to kill as many fish as he can, any way he can, without any sort of guilt. Unlike
a wild animal that tends to find any break in its routine disastrous, Pi is pliable, versatile, and resourceful.
Even without his devotional objects, he holds onto his religious customs, adapting them and integrating them
into his daily routine. Though he is a strict vegetarian, he soon finds himself drinking turtle blood, skinning
birds, and eating eyes and brains. It is easy for him to slip into a routine—he becomes a creature of a new
habit.

Part Two: Chapters 80–95

Summary

A terrific storm rolls in and sends Pi scrambling into the lifeboat, where he lies flat on a bench at the end far-
thest from Richard Parker. He closes the tarpaulin over them both. The storms rages for a day and night, dur-
ing which time the boat climbs up waves that resemble mountains. When the storm subsides, Pi realizes that
the raft is gone; only a couple oars and a life jacket remain. His stores of water are unharmed, but the lifeboat
itself has sustained some damage. Pi starts mending the torn tarpaulin and bailing out water. In one bucketful
he finds the orange whistle he has used to train Richard Parker.

Pi sees several seabirds. He kills a masked booby, skins it, and eats its edible parts. One day a lightning
storm puts Pi in a state of exaltation; Richard Parker cowers in fear. Another day, a tanker appears on the
horizon and Pi is sure they will be saved. Instead, the tanker, oblivious to the small lifeboat, nearly runs them
over. Later, the lifeboat wanders into a mass of trash, from which Pi salvages a bottle. He seals a message in it
and throws it back into the ocean.

Pi's condition continues to deteriorate, as does Richard Parker’s. Pi is convinced he is near death. His pen
runs out of ink and he can no longer write in his diary. He begins sleeping many hours a day, slipping into a
state of semiconsciousness. Pi goes blind, and in his sightless delirium, he hears a voice. The voice speaks to
him, and Pi responds, talking about food. The voice, with a French accent, speaks of beef and brains and all
sorts of food that Pi finds distasteful. Pi assumes he is hearing the voice of Richard Parker, but the French
accent does not make sense to him.

Pi asks the voice if he has ever killed anyone, and the voice says yes, a man and a woman. The voice grows
weak and Pi urges it to come back. The voice belongs to a blind man, a castaway like Pi, and they join their
boats together. The man climbs aboard Pi’s boat in order to kill and cannibalize him. But when he steps down
onto the floor of the boat, Richard Parker kills him. Pi cries and rinses his eyes with seawater. His vision
returns, and he sees the other man’s butchered body.

The lifeboat comes across a low island covered entirely with algae. Pi and Richard Parker stop for a time,
eating the vegetation, drinking the fresh water, and nursing themselves back to health. The island is full of
meerkats, small ferretlike creatures, and Pi sees that the island’s fresh ponds are full of dead fish. A storm hits
while Pi and Richard Parker are ashore, and the island weathers it beautifully, absorbing the ocean’s ferocious
waves. Pi notices that the island burns his feet at night but not during the day. Seeing that meerkats spend the
nights in the treetops, Pi, who has been sleeping on the lifeboat, joins them.

One day, Pi discovers a tree that bears fruit. However, the center of each fruit holds a human tooth. From
this evidence, Pi decides that the island is carnivorous. He stocks the lifeboat with dead fish and meerkats and
eats and drinks his fill of algae and fresh water. Then he waits for Richard Parker to board the lifeboat and pushes off into the sea.

The lifeboat washes ashore on a Mexican beach. Pi sprawls in the sand and Richard Parker bounds away into the jungle. Pi weeps at the loss of his comrade, saddened that he wasn’t able to say goodbye. Villagers rescue Pi and take him to a hospital, where they clean him up and feed him. He cannot understand their language but realizes he is finally saved.

Analysis

Like the erratic motions of the ocean’s currents, this final section of Pi’s journey contains several unexpected stops and starts. First there is the storm, which Pi feels certain will cause his death. Then, the appearance of the tanker holds the potential for rescue, but ends in hopelessness. Next comes Pi’s dialogue with Richard Parker, which melds into the arrival of the French-accented castaway, whose companionship offers one sort of ending but whose murderous instincts offer a very different sort of ending. The island, too, begins as a beacon of hope, a seemingly healthful oasis that turns out to be dangerous. The real conclusion, when it comes, is sudden and unexpected. Without warning, the lifeboat lands in Mexico, and Pi is saved. The arbitrary nature of this landfall is both convenient to the storyline and emblematic of the changeable nature of the ocean, which has carried them throughout.

As Pi’s situation grows more desperate, his efforts to communicate become increasingly urgent and as frequently thwarted. He waves and shouts to the passing tanker and even tries to fire off a signal flare; all to no avail. The people aboard the ship do not even notice the tiny lifeboat they nearly crush. Later, Pi sends out a message in a bottle, but it is never found. So, desperate to talk, to tell stories, he has a conversation with Richard Parker. When he bumps into another castaway, Pi talks himself hoarse, elated at the company. But, this attempt at communication also ends in disappointment: the death of his new friend. Pi’s journaling, his communion with himself, comes to an end when the pen dries up and he cannot write another word. In Mexico, he is neither able to give Richard Parker a satisfying farewell nor understand the language of his rescuers. Communication fails him at every end.

The odd natural phenomena Pi encounters illustrate his inner struggles. The floating island symbolizes Pi’s own despair. As Pi notes, it would not have killed him immediately had he stayed; rather, it would have eaten away at his soul, deadening his spirit and causing a numbing hopelessness. The carnivorous vegetation represents Pi’s pessimism, his dwindling hope that he will ever be found. To stay on the island would be to give up, to decide to end his days on a man-eating island rather than in civilization. Pi’s choice to leave the island and get back into the ocean is his way of remaining optimistic, however minutely, about his odds of salvation.

Part Three (Benito Juárez Infirmary, Tomatlán, Mexico): Chapters 96–100

Summary

Two officials from the Maritime Department in the Japanese Ministry of Transport, Tomohiro Okamoto and Atsuro Chiba, are in California on unrelated business when they hear that Pi has made landfall in Tomatlán, Mexico. The Ministry directs them to speak with Pi, the lone survivor of the Japanese Tsimtsum, to try to better understand why the ship sank. Okamoto looks at a map and accidentally confuses Tomatán, in Baja California, with Tomatlán in Mexico. He decides to drive to see Pi, but the journey is full of accidents and car repairs and winds up taking forty-one long hours. By the time Okamoto and Chiba reach Pi, they are exhausted. They set about interviewing Pi, in English. Martel provides us with the transcript of their conversation, which includes portions spoken by Okamoto and Chiba in Japanese and which Martel has had translated by a third party. The translated passages are presented to the reader in a different font from the rest of the interview transcript.

The interview begins. It is February 19, 1978. Chiba has turned on the tape recorder, so the entire conversation is on record. Okamoto introduces himself and Chiba, his assistant. Chiba is new at his job, and Oka-
moto tells him to pay attention and try to learn. Pi asks the two men if they had a nice trip coming down from California, and Okamoto says that they had a wonderful trip. Pi says he had a horrible trip. Prior to meeting Pi, Okamoto and Chiba saw the lifeboat. Now they offer Pi a cookie, which he gratefully accepts, and ask him to tell his story. Chapter 97 consists of two words only: “The story.” Okamoto and Chiba tell Pi that they find his story very interesting, but in Japanese they express their disbelief. Pi asks for another cookie—he has taken to storing cookies beneath his bed sheet. Okamoto decides to take a break and tells Pi they will be right back.

When the two men return, they tell Pi that they do not believe his story. For example, they say, bananas do not float. Pi pulls two bananas out from under his bed sheet and asks the men to test them in the room’s sink. Okamoto fills the sink and tests the bananas; they float. Okamoto continues grilling Pi, telling him that many aspects of his story are impossible and contradict the laws of nature. Chiba pipes up and says that his uncle is a bonsai master, and Pi cleverly states that bonsai trees—“Three-hundred-year-old trees that are two feet tall that you can carry in your arms”—must not exist because they are botanically impossible. Okamoto says there has been no trace of Richard Parker in or around Tomatlán. Pi explains that wild creatures are adept at hiding from humans, even in cities.

Pi asks the two men if they disliked his story. Okamoto replies that they enjoyed it, but that they need to know what really happened. Pi says he will tell another story. In this story, the four occupants of the lifeboat are Pi, his mother, the cook (an ill-tempered, greedy French man), and a sailor (a beautiful young Chinese boy). The sailor had broken his leg jumping into the lifeboat, and the cook cuts the leg off and tries to use it for bait. The sailor dies and the cook butchers and eats him. Pi and his mother, both horrified, try to stop him. The cook kills Pi’s mother and throws her head in Pi’s direction. Soon after, Pi fights the cook and kills him. He eats his heart and liver and pieces of his flesh. Then, as Pi says to Okamoto and Chiba, “Solitude began. I turned to God. I survived.”

Okamoto and Chiba are appalled but notice all the parallels between the characters and actions of this second story and the first story. They ask more technical questions, but Pi can tell them nothing to help solve the mystery of the Tsimtsum’s sinking. Pi asks them which story they preferred: the one with animals or the one without. Both Chiba and Okamoto agree that the one with animals is “the better story.” In his report, which years later he sends to Martel, Okamoto writes that Pi’s story of survival at sea with an adult Bengal tiger is astonishing and unique.

Analysis

In the course of thirty pages, the sad tale we have been reading takes on a new and even more tragic layer of meaning when Pi reveals another version, one in which the animals are replaced by humans. Once we learn this, we immediately assume that Pi has probably made up the animal version as a way to cope with extreme tragedy. The beautiful, noble zebra represents the exotic Chinese sailor. The gutless, violent, ugly hyena embodies all the revolting qualities of the greedy, cowardly cook. The maternal orangutan, with her vaguely human body and mannerisms, represents Pi’s own mother. And the tiger is Pi himself, alternately vicious, passive, watchful, ravenous, self-contained, tamed, and feral. Both versions of the story—with and without animals—are viable, and Pi never tells us definitively which tale is true. Still, Pi seems to confess in these last chapters that he has made up his entire story as a way to cope with a shocking series of events. Only storytelling has the power to rescue him and deliver him from the absolute depths of despair.

Martel tweaks the traditional rendering of animals in children’s tales to strengthen Pi’s original story and to illustrate the similarities between humans and animals. Fables and children’s stories regularly make use of anthropomorphized animal characters. However, in Life of Pi, the animals are drawn realistically and behave in ways that are true to their species. In this way, Martel enables the protagonist, Pi, to make a strong case for the believability of his Richard Parker account—something that would not be possible if, for example, Richard Parker were a talking tiger or a tiger that magically turns, against his very nature, into Pi’s best friend. Furthermore, he drives home the point that we humans are not so different from animals after all. Deprived of the luxuries and conveniences we have built up for ourselves in modern times, we resort to our basic instincts and animalistic roots.

Part Three conveys the difficulty of communicating precisely and accurately. Pi tells two different stories about his time at sea. At the broadest level, this deception illustrates the ability and willingness of humans to embellish and alter the truth, to fill in forgotten details with fictions and lies. It also suggests the difficulty of
arriving at a single objective truth, as opposed to differing interpretations of events. The smaller details, too, send the reader a message that it is extremely hard to use language precisely. A word is a signal or symbol used to point to things that exist in the world. Given that all of human language is metaphorical in this way, a person can never give an objective, unbiased, fact-based account. Even the tape-recorded conversation between Pi and the two interviewers is not entirely unbiased: the Japanese portions of the text are not original because they have been filtered through a third party, the translator. Okamoto’s final report, delivered to the Ministry of Transport, is also selective and subjective. Clearly, even in documents and journalistic accounts there seems to be a great deal of creative authorship involved. The bottom line, Martel seems to say, is that there can never be only one right account of a thing, event, person, place, or conversation. Experience is always open to interpretation.

Part Three provides the most important phrase of the novel: “the better story.” With those three words, we come to understand that this is a book about how we choose what to believe and how we come to grips with a reality that is often more horrible than we can stand. In other words, as Pi reveals to us and to his two interviewers, the human capacity for imagination and invention is a mechanism for self-preservation. Pi is conscious that he has two stories to offer us: one with animals and one without. He is also aware that the one with animals is the more enjoyable of the two, the version that we, his audience, would much rather remember. The story with the Bengal tiger is farfetched but engaging, even charming. The version with the cannibalistic cook and the death of Pi’s mother, on the other hand, is heartbreaking and extremely upsetting. It reveals the underlying ferocity of our animal nature, something that we humans do not like to know about ourselves.

If fiction is an escape hatch or a gentler version of the truth, then religion is a lifeboat that keeps us afloat in the face of our own mortality. Both fiction and religion perform a similar function. They take the simple biological imperatives—we are born, we live, we die—and color them with narrative in an effort to make them more palatable, more personal, more digestible. All religions provide believers with a creation story, rituals for daily life, and stories that illustrate, in an indirect way, the nature of human life. All fiction supplies us with characters, settings, and language that help us get closer and closer to grasping universal truths. The significance of religion within Martel’s novel is just like that of fiction: both use metaphor, simile, allusion, imagery, and hyperbole to help us understand and live with the realities of human existence.
Important Quotations Explained

1. I know zoos are no longer in people’s good graces. Religion faces the same problem. Certain illusions about freedom plague them both.

These words are spoken by Pi early in Part One, at the end of chapter 4, after a long discussion of zoo enclosures. Mr. Patel, Pi has recently told us, runs the Pondicherry Zoo, a place that Pi considered paradise as a boy. Pi has heard many people say negative things about zoos—namely that they deprive noble, wild creatures of their freedom and trap them in boring, domesticated lives—but he disagrees. Wild animals in their natural habitat encounter fear, fighting, lack of food, and parasites on a regular basis. Given all these biological facts, animals in the wild are not free at all—rather, they are subject to a stringent set of social and natural laws that they must follow or die. Since animals are creatures of habit, zoo enclosures, with abundant food and water, clean cages, and a constant routine, are heaven for them. Given the chance, Pi says, most zoo animals do not ever try to escape, unless something in their cage frightens them.

We have already learned that Pi studied zoology and religion at the University of Toronto, and the above quote demonstrates just how closely aligned the two subjects are in his mind. He is quick to turn a discussion of animal freedom into a metaphor for people’s religious inclinations. Just as people misunderstand the nature of animals in the wild, they also misunderstand what it means for a person to be “free” of any religious system of belief. The agnostic (someone who is uncertain about the existence of god and does not subscribe to any faith) may think he is at liberty to believe or disbelieve anything he wants, but in reality he does not allow himself to take imaginative leaps. Instead, he endures life’s ups and downs the way an animal in the wild does: because he has to. A person of faith, on the other hand, is like an animal in an enclosure, surrounded on all sides by a version of reality that is far kinder than reality itself. Pi embraces religious doctrine for the same reason he embraces the safety and security of a zoo enclosure: it makes life easier and more pleasurable.

2. I can well imagine an atheist’s last words: “White, white! L-L-Love! My God!”—and the deathbed leap of faith. Whereas the agnostic, if he stays true to his reasonable self, if he stays beholden to dry, yeastless factuality, might try to explain the warm light bathing him by saying, “Possibly a f-f-failing oxygenation of the b-b-brain,” and, to the very end, lack imagination and miss the better story.

Spoken by Pi, this quotation—chapter 22 in its entirety—emphasizes the important distinction between facts and imagination, the crux of the entire novel. Previously, in chapter 21, the author used the phrases “dry, yeastless factuality” and “the better story” after a meeting with Pi in a café; the repetition highlights this dichotomy. Religion is aligned with imagination, while lack of faith is linked to accurate observation and rationalism. In short, Pi is giving us a simple, straightforward explanation for the variants of his own story: the one with animals and the one without.

The quote condemns those who lack artistry and imagination, the inability to commit to a story. Pi himself is a consummate artist, a storyteller, and he believes all religions tell wonderful tales, though not literal truths. Pi believes that atheists (who do not believe in God) have the capacity to believe; they choose to believe that God doesn’t exist. At the end of their lives, they could embrace the notion of God and devise a story that will help them die in peace and contentment. Pi despises agnostics for their decision to make uncertainty a way of life. They choose to live a life of doubt, without any sort of narrative to guide them. Without these stories, our existence is “dry” and unpalatable as unrisen or “yeastless” bread.
3. "Without Richard Parker, I wouldn’t be alive today to tell you my story.

This line is spoken by Pi approximately halfway through the book, in chapter 57. The “you” in this sentence is the author, to whom Pi relates his story over the course of many meetings in Canada many years after the ordeal. Of course, the “you” is also the reader, for Pi is aware that he is telling his story to a writer who has the intent to publish. By this point, we know that Richard Parker is a Royal Bengal tiger, an adult male, who weighs 450 pounds and takes up about one-third of the lifeboat. At first, it might sound ludicrous that such a menacing creature should get credit for keeping alive a slender, adolescent Indian boy, but Pi explains himself compellingly. The presence of Richard Parker, though initially terrifying, eventually soothes him and saves him from utter existential loneliness. Moreover, the necessity of training and taking care of Richard Parker fills up Pi’s long, empty days—staying busy helps time pass.

The quotation can also be considered in the context of Pi’s second story, the one without animals, in which Pi himself is the tiger. Pi has chosen a tiger to represent himself because of its conflicting qualities: nobility and violence, grace and brute force, intelligence and instinct. In a way, these qualities are very human. But on a day-to-day basis—for example, as we go to school, drive to the supermarket, and watch TV at night—the elements of violence, brutality, and instinct are blunted. Instead of catching and killing fish, we purchase plastic-wrapped filets; rather than hunt animals for meat, we buy steaks at the deli counter. Stripped of these conveniences, Pi must return to nature and reassert his animal instincts. He must overcome his squeamishness in order to eat. He must embrace aggression in order to kill the cook who might otherwise have killed him. In crediting Richard Parker’s existence for his own survival, Pi acknowledges that it is animal instinct, not polite convention or modern convenience, that protects him from death.

4. Life on a lifeboat isn’t much of a life. It is like an end game in chess, a game with few pieces. The elements couldn’t be more simple, nor the stakes higher.

This comment appears about halfway through Part Two, as Pi adjusts to life at sea and philosophizes on the nature of being a castaway. In an endgame in chess, most of the game has been played out and the majority of the chess pieces knocked off the board.

Similarly, after the sinking of the Tsimtsum, only a handful of survivors (Pi, Richard Parker, Orange Juice, the Grant’s zebra, the hyena) remain. The few that are left are forced into a strategic battle of wits to see who will ultimately prevail. The tensions between the lifeboat’s inhabitants immediately after the ship sinks are high; each inhabitant knows that the game is “sudden death” and that each move must be considered with special care. The zebra, the orangutan, and the hyena all make missteps and lose. But Pi painstakingly charts out his plan of action, and his diligence and foresight save his life.

Life on a lifeboat is simple, but, stripped of all else, the stakes become considerable: life or death. Pi’s life in the middle of the Pacific has no luxuries, no complex processes to participate in, and no obscure signals to follow. Faced with numerous physical dangers—Richard Parker, sharks, starvation, the blind castaway—his only real choice is whether to fight to live or to give up and die. Though he considers doing otherwise, Pi chooses to fight.

The distilled quality of Pi’s existence is similar to the kind of bare-bones life lived by many religious mystics, for whom stripping down to the essentials is necessary for communion with God. A full, varied life with many distractions can cloud faith or even make it unnecessary. However, within a spare and even monastic existence, God’s presence becomes palpable. To put it another way, within the confines of a lifeboat, spirituality looms as large as a nearly 10-foot, 450-pound Bengal tiger.

5. The lower you are, the higher your mind will want to soar.

Pi narrates these words in chapter 93, toward the end of his ordeal at sea and as he is reaching the depths of his despair. As Pi mentions just before this, his situation seems “as pointless as the weather.” Up to now, Pi’s tedious life at sea has been alleviated somewhat with sporadic new activities: killing fish, taming Richard Parker, creating drinkable water using the solar stills, and so on. More notably, the blind French castaway and the days spent on the floating island gave Pi a change in routine. But now the novelty has worn off. This section, in which nothing is expected to happen, drives Pi into utter hopelessness, yet he must continue living.
At this point Pi turns to God and, Martel implies, invents the story that we have just read. His mind is desperate to escape the physical reality of continued existence on the lifeboat, and so it soars into the realm of fiction. At his lowest point, Pi reaches for the only remaining sources of salvation available to him: faith and imagination. Through the plot’s remaining action, Martel emphasizes that such a strategy for self-preservation can actually be astonishingly effective. Immediately after this moment in the text, Pi lands on a beach in Mexico. Like a deus ex machina suddenly offering resolution in an ancient Greek play, the religion of storytelling is Pi’s escape hatch, rescuing him from the depths of his misery.
# Key Facts

**Full title**  
*Life of Pi*

**Author**  
Yann Martel

**Type of work**  
Novel

**Genre**  
Allegory; fable

**Language**  
English

**Time and place written**  
Researched in India and Canada and written in Canada in the late 1990s

**Date of first publication**  
2002

**Publisher**  
Canongate Books Ltd.

**Narrator**  
Piscine Molitor Patel and the author, Yann Martel

**Point of view**  
The prefatory Author's Note is written in first person by the author, who explains how he came to hear the story we are about to read from Pi Patel himself. The account (Part One and Part Two) is told in first person by Pi. The final section of the book (Part Three) is written mainly as a transcript of a conversation between Pi and two officials, bookended by first-person comments from the author.

**Tone**  
Funny, surreal, ruminative, philosophical, and, at times, journalistic

**Tense**  
Past tense

**Setting (time)**  
The author tells Pi’s story from an undetermined contemporary point, some years after the publication of his second book in 1996. Pi’s ordeal begins on July 2, 1977, and continues for 227 days.

**Setting (place)**  
Pi’s boyhood home in Pondicherry, India; the Pacific Ocean; Tomatlán, Mexico; and, briefly, Toronto, Canada
Protagonist

Piscine Molitor Patel

Major conflict

The Tsintsum sinks, drowning Pi's entire family, the crew, and most of the animals aboard. For months, Pi, along with a Royal Bengal tiger, must fight for survival aboard a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Rising action

The Patel family sets sail to Canada.

Climax

The first climax is when the Tsintsum sinks and Pi's family dies, leaving him alone with wild animals on a lifeboat. Another climax occurs when Pi lands in Mexico.

Falling action

Pi is rescued in Mexico. Two Japanese officials interview him. His story is called into doubt.

Themes

The power of life's force; the human desire for companionship; storytelling as a strategy for self-preservation.

Motifs

Territorial dominance; hunger and thirst; rituals.

Symbols

Pi, the lifeboat, Richard Parker.

Foreshadowing

The opening pages of the book are supremely suspenseful, as the author and Pi himself continually make reference to some tragic episode in Pi's life without actually naming it. Pi describes his gloomy state of mind upon arriving in Canada and explains how his religious and zoological studies helped him to rebuild his life. But it is not until the Tsintsum sinks in Part Two and Pi loses his family that we understand the source of his intense suffering, though we do sense it coming all along.
Study Questions & Essay Topics

Study Questions

1. How does the idea of survival play out in this text?

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: he must keep his body alive. This requires food and water, both in short supply, as well as protection from the elements. Pi knows he must defend himself from the immediate threat, Richard Parker, but he is also aware that there is a whole host of dangers waiting to do him in. Ocean storms, huge waves, sharks, sunstroke, dehydration, drowning—any and all of these things pose a risk to his life. Pi’s inventiveness and resourcefulness (he covers himself with wet clothes to protect his skin from the sun and builds a raft from oars and lifejackets to keep him at a safe distance from both the tiger and sharks) enable him to remain physically safe.

Second, and more difficult, is the necessity of emotional or spiritual survival—the fact that Pi must keep his spirits up or else succumb to despair. Pi says at several points that Richard Parker helped him endure; the presence of a companion (even an imagined one, in the non-animal version of the story) gives Pi mental strength, and the requirements of caring for a tiger keep him occupied, preventing him from thinking too much about his fate.

Biological survival—living a long life, raising a family, and passing ones genes down through the generations—represents the third level. Pi is the sole member of his family to survive the sinking of the Tsimtsum, and he is able to do so largely because he has inherited (from Mamaji) strong swimming skills and an affinity for water. Now Pi must propagate the Patel line. When we learn that Pi is a father, the author tells us, “This story has a happy ending.” Ultimately, Pi achieves survival in every sense.

2. What does Pi try to communicate through his choice of the animals, other than the tiger, with whom he shares the lifeboat?

The animals in the lifeboat embody qualities that represent their human counterparts. Orange Juice, the orangutan, is a motherly figure that represents Pi’s own mother. Pi remembers how the gentle orangutan used to hold him when he was a boy, picking at his hair to hone her maternal skills. When she defends herself against the hyena, Pi realizes that she has reservoirs of courage and fierceness. This surprisingly revelation about her character parallels Pi’s shock in seeing his mother stand up courageously to the cook.

The hyena, with its ugly appearance and disgusting personal habits, represents the cook, whose greed, savagery, and cannibalism mark him as a truly evil figure in the text. Finally, the Grant’s zebra is an exotic creature, lovely to look at but foreign to Indian culture. The two Mr. Kumars who join Pi at the zoo have never seen a zebra before and marvel at it. A zebra, therefore, serves as an ideal stand-in for the young Chinese sailor who, although he does not speak Pi’s language, exudes decency and natural beauty. It is particularly appalling for the cook/hyena to desecrate such an innocent, stunning creature.

3. Discuss the importance of believability in this novel.

Pi is a believer in the fullest sense of the word: he uses his rational intellect to take him as far as he can go and then he takes imaginative leaps. As Pi himself tells the two Japanese officials who interview him in Mexico, many things are difficult to believe, but we convince ourselves to do so nonetheless: “Love is hard to believe, ask any lover. Life is hard to believe, ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer.” We give ourselves to these fictions, these variants on reality, because they give us a reason to keep going. Where is the joy in a life deprived of romance and passion? Where is the self-awareness in a life that is merely a biological accident? Where is the comfort in an existence that has no rhyme or reason? A life that is entirely rational or fact
Based is almost not worth living. To Pi, and to anyone who believes in things that he cannot necessarily see nor prove, faith is a bridge between the coldness of fact and the warmth of emotion. The ability to believe is a hallmark of consciousness and awareness, one reason religions are so fiercely protected and so widely practiced. To believe in something makes us feel more alive, more connected to the world around us, giving structure to our understanding of the universe and our place in it in a way that pure science, based solely on observation, never can.

Beyond serving as a foundational theme for the text, believability is integral to the very structure of the novel. Even as Pi asks us to believe his animal story, Martel asks us to believe the story he tells, of meeting Francis Adirubasamy and looking up Pi Patel in his Toronto phone book. We, the reader, know that these things did not really happen to Martel, yet we suspend our disbelief so as to become more wholly absorbed in the text. Martel’s fictional story far rivals the truth, which is likely that he had an idea, did his research, and then worked very hard for months and months to write his novel. That the novel begins with a supposedly nonfictional Author’s Note and ends with the transcript of an interview and the text of an official report establishes the larger message that all storytellers—both Pi and Martel included—require the audience’s trust, or belief.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Religion is of utmost importance to Pi. Discuss the role of religion in his life and how it helps him survive his ordeal.

2. Naming and names are significant in this novel—Pi’s own name is elaborately explained, and Richard Parker gets his name through a clerical error. How is naming relevant to the novel’s main themes?

3. In light of the fact that this is a novel about imagination, why does Martel begin with the Author’s Note, which gives the impression that Pi’s account is truth, not fiction?

4. One of the ways that Pi keeps himself sane and occupied while alone in the middle of the ocean is by writing in his journal. What does his journaling say about the human need for communication?

5. The two Japanese officials who interview Pi don’t believe that he really landed on a man-eating island. When they say that carnivorous trees and fish-eating algae do not exist, Pi responds, “Only because you’ve never seen them.” What does this exchange say about human understanding of what is real and possible?

6. Why does Pi give two accounts of his ordeal? Which is the true story, and which one would you rather believe?
Quiz

1. Piscine Molitor Patel is named after
   A. a famous Indian government official
   B. a scientific instrument
   C. a swimming pool
   D. a close family relative

2. Pi's father runs the
   A. Pondicherry drug store
   B. Pondicherry Zoo
   C. Pondicherry Circus
   D. Pondicherry veterinary clinic

3. Pi's father teaches him and his brother, Ravi, a lesson about wild animals by
   A. feeding a wild goat to a tiger
   B. playing a video tape of a lion circus stunt gone wrong
   C. throwing fish into a shark tank
   D. showing them a scar he received from a hyena

4. Which of the following religions does Pi not practice?
   A. Islam
   B. Christianity
   C. Buddhism
   D. Hindu

5. Pi has a special affinity for his
   A. yarmulke
   B. prayer mat
   C. Bible
   D. prayer beads

6. The Tsimtsum is
   A. a ship
   B. a religious text
   C. a type of wild animal
   D. None of the above

7. When they set sail, Pi's family is headed to
   A. Mexico
   B. England
   C. the United States
   D. Canada
8. Pi’s family leaves India in
   A. 1967
   B. 1977
   C. 1987
   D. 1997

9. Pi describes the sound of the ship sinking as
   A. a metallic burp
   B. a thundering sigh
   C. a shuddering moan
   D. a piercing cry

10. Crew members throw Pi into a lifeboat because
    A. they are simply following protocol
    B. they want to get him out of harm’s way
    C. his family is already in the lifeboat
    D. they are trying to lure out a hyena that’s hiding there

11. Pi shares the lifeboat with all of the following except
    A. a zebra
    B. an orangutan
    C. an agouti
    D. a hyena

12. Richard Parker is
    A. a house pet
    B. a tiger
    C. Pi’s uncle
    D. the ship’s captain

13. Pi sees an orangutan named Orange Juice floating on a raft made of
    A. oars
    B. wood planks
    C. bananas
    D. oranges

14. The zebra sustained which of the following injuries jumping into the lifeboat?
    A. A chipped hoof
    B. A torn ear
    C. A broken leg
    D. A gash in its side

15. In the lifeboat’s locker, Pi discovers cans full of
    A. water
    B. soup
    C. soda
    D. beans

16. To keep himself at a safe distance from Richard Parker, Pi
    A. swims alongside the boat
    B. builds a raft and tethers it to the boat
    C. constructs a wall from wooden planks
    D. hangs off the side of the boat
17. The hyena meets its end when
   A. a wave washes it overboard
   B. it succumbs to dehydration
   C. a shark catches it
   D. Richard Parker kills and eats it

18. *Prusten* is the sound tigers make to express
   A. friendliness
   B. nausea
   C. hunger
   D. anger

19. Which becomes Pi’s most valuable tool in training Richard Parker?
   A. A whip
   B. A whistle
   C. An oar
   D. A megaphone

20. The first time Pi kills a fish for food, he
   A. rejoices
   B. throws it back
   C. cries
   D. sings

21. One day the lifeboat is almost hit by a
   A. tanker
   B. dolphin
   C. submarine
   D. whale

22. Pi decides to leave the strange floating island because
   A. he worries no one will ever find him there
   B. wild beasts inhabit it
   C. there is nothing for him to eat
   D. the vegetation is man eating

23. The fellow castaway Pi meets while suffering from temporary blindness
   A. is eaten by Richard Parker
   B. drowns while trying to climb into Pi’s lifeboat
   C. dies from starvation and dehydration
   D. tries to swim away and is eaten by a shark

24. Pi’s raft washes ashore near the small town of Tomatlán in
   A. Peru
   B. Mexico
   C. Chile
   D. Argentina
25. After his rescue, Pi is interviewed by two officials from the
   A. Japanese Ministry of Transport
   B. Japanese Department of Police
   C. Japanese Shipping Association
   D. Japanese Zoological Society

   **ANSWER KEY:**

   **Suggestions for Further Reading**


