

Life of Pi – by Yann Martel

Author's Note

1. What is suggested by the author's comment about fiction being "the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence"?
2. Why did the author go to India?
3. Why does the author mail his manuscript for the book about Portugal to a made-up address in Siberia?
4. Who first tells the author about Mr. Patel's story? How many storytellers does this make in the book so far?
5. What is most significant about the story that the author hears?

Part One: Toronto and Pondicherry

Chapter 1

1. What is suggested by the fact that the Author's note was set in italics, and Chapter 1 is set in normal text?
2. Who do we assume is the speaker of Chapter 1? What suggests this?
3. Why did the person speaking in Chapter 1 choose to study the sloth?
4. What we can infer about Mr. Patel from his tone?
5. What is significant about the cities Mr. Patel says he would like to visit?
6. What were Mr. Patel's two majors in college? What connection does he make between the two? How do they foreshadow what is likely to come later in the novel?
7. What can we infer about the narrator so far?

Chapter 2

1. What do the language and format of this chapter establish for the reader?
2. What is significant about the details the fictional author chooses to reveal about Mr. Patel?

Chapter 3

1. What might the origin of Patel's name foreshadow?
2. What significant trait did the narrator and Mamaji share?
3. Who is the man Patel calls Mamaji, who teaches Patel how to swim? How have we already met him?
4. What does the name "Mamaji" mean?
5. What distinction does Mr. Patel make between the ocean and the swimming pool? What is the significance of this distinction?
6. In this chapter, we finally learn the full name of our narrator. What is it and how did he get it?
7. What is significant about the narrator's name?
8. What did Piscine's father do for a living?

Chapter 4

1. What did Piscine's father do before he became a zookeeper? What comment does Piscine make about the transition from hotel owner to zookeeper?
2. How does Pi feel about growing up in a zoo? In terms of the Bildungsroman narrative, what might the zoo symbolize?
3. What is Piscine implying when he says that the only "relentless imperatives" felt by animals is avoiding enemies and securing food and water?
4. What is Piscine implying when he says that "a house is compressed territory, where our basic needs can be fulfilled close by and safely"?
5. Does Piscine believe animals are better off in the wild or in a zoo?
6. What comparison does the adult Piscine make between the impulse to "free" animals and invading a person's home and "freeing" him? Why is this comparison significant?
7. What does Pi mean when he says that "certain illusions about freedom plague" both zoos and religion?

Chapter 5

1. What might be significant about the name Pi chooses for himself?

2. What does Pi mean at the end of this chapter when he says, "in that elusive, irrational number with which scientists try to understand the universe, I found refuge."
3. What personal characteristics does Pi exhibit in choosing to change his own name?

Chapter 6

1. What does the author's description of Patel's kitchen suggest?

Chapter 7

1. What language and imagery does Pi use to describe Mr. Kumar? Why is it significant?
2. Why does Mr. Kumar love the zoo?
3. What does the zoo represent to Mr. Kumar?
4. Why does Mr. Kumar not believe in God?
5. Why doesn't Pi argue with Mr. Kumar about the existence of God?
6. How are atheists like believers, according to Pi?
7. What problem does Pi have with agnostics?

Chapter 8

1. Why do zoologists "commonly say...that the most dangerous animal in a zoo is man"?
- What animal does Pi's father believe is "even more dangerous than us"?
2. What does Pi mean when he says, "The obsession with putting ourselves at the center of everything is the bane not only of theologians but also of zoologists"?
3. What is the point of the episode Pi relates about the ravenous tiger and the goat? Why has Martel placed this episode in the same chapter with the discussion of anthropomorphism?
- What might this episode foreshadow?

Chapter 9

1. What is a "flight distance"?
2. Why is an understanding of animals' flight distance important to a zookeeper?

Chapter 10

1. What are some of the reasons Pi gives for animals' wanting to escape from zoos?
2. Why does Pi go into such detail explaining how zoos work?
3. What, according to Pi, does "an animal hate above all else"?

Chapter 11

1. What happened to the leopard that escaped from a zoo in Zurich in the 1930s, and what does the story illustrate?
2. What might Pi mean by the following: "And they expected to find—ha! In the middle of a Mexican tropical jungle, imagine!"

Chapter 12

1. What does the narrator's saying that Pi Patel "bobs" on the "ocean of memory" foreshadow?
2. Who is Richard Parker who "preys on [Pi Patel's] mind"?

Chapter 13

1. Why is Mr. Patel still spending so much time discussing animal behavior and how humans gain "control" over dangerous wild animals?
2. Why is social hierarchy important to animals? What does this have to do with the story Mr. Patel is going to tell the narrator?

Chapter 14

1. Why is the animal with the "lowest social standing" also the easiest to train?

Chapter 15

1. What can be inferred from the religious artifacts that the author sees in Patel's house about the person who lives in that house?
2. What is the tone of his language as he describes the religious objects?

Chapter 16

1. Explain Pi's concept of the Brahman nirguna.
2. What is Brahman saguna?

3. What does Pi say made him a Hindu?
4. What is the point of Pi's tale of Krishna and the milkmaids?

Chapter 17

1. What confuses Pi about Christianity?
2. According to Father Martin, what is the key to the entire Christian story?
3. What does Pi like most about Christianity? How does he compare it to his own Hinduism?

Chapter 18

1. Compare the ways Pi comes to know Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.
2. What first impresses Pi about Islam?

Chapter 19

1. Why does Piscine like praying in the mosque?
2. What, then, do each of Pi's three religions give to him?

Chapter 20

1. What is ironic about the Muslim baker's name? What is Martel suggesting by naming him this?
2. What two intensely religious experiences does Pi describe in this chapter? Why are they significant?

Chapter 21

1. What impact is his growing friendship with Mr. Patel having on the fictional author?
2. What do the phrases, "dry, yeastless factuality" and "the better story" suggest?

Chapters 22 – 23

1. The second speaker in Chapter 22 says he "can well imagine an atheist's last words: 'White, white! L-L-Love! My God!'" Why does he think that these would be the last words an atheist would utter before death?
2. To whom does Pi refer when he speaks of "the (three) wise men"?
3. What is Pi's father's attitude toward religion?
4. What is ironic about the meeting of the three religious men?
5. Briefly outline each religious man's argument against the other two religions. What is the point of this scene?
6. What is the power of Pi's response to the competing religious men?
7. On what kind of note does this chapter end?

Chapters 24 – 25

1. Why does Yann Martel make this chapter about Ravi's teasing Pi so short, with so relatively few examples and a general dismissal at the end?
2. What ironies does Pi point out in this chapter?

Chapter 26

1. What is the primary conflict in this chapter, represented by Pi, his father, and his mother?
2. What is it that causes Pi's mother to look weary and to sigh, "Good grief" by the end of this chapter?

Chapter 27

1. In addition to religion, what outside influence begins to impose itself on Pi's family in this chapter? What plot event is clearly foreshadowed?
2. What biological theory does Mr. Patel's attitude toward technology resemble? Why is this significant?

Chapters 28 – 29

1. To what does Pi compare his baptism—being sprinkled with a beaker-full of water?
2. What causes the Patel family to leave India?
3. Why does Pi make a point of telling us the animals' reactions to the political situation in India?

Chapter 30

1. What is the surprise that Pi has for the writer at his home?
2. Why has Pi not mentioned that he is married?
3. What does Pi's wife do for a living?

Chapters 31 – 32

1. What is the significance of the meeting of the two Mr. Kumars?
2. What point(s) is Pi establishing with his accounts of

zoomorphism and unusual cohabitations of prey and predator?

3. Why does zoomorphism occur? What does Pi's explanation foreshadow?

Chapters 33 – 34

1. What is suggested by Pi's telling the author that everything from before the family's emigration was "lost"?
2. What do we learn about Richard Parker from the photograph that Pi shows the author?
3. What is, ironically, the difference between the author's account (in italics) and Pi's?

Chapter 35

1. How old is Pi when he and his family embark for Canada?
2. Why is the real reason Pi's mother worries about the brand names of items available in Canada? How does this advance a theme that has already been suggested?

Chapter 36

1. What surprises the narrator in this chapter?
2. Upon meeting Pi's son and daughter, the writer says that "this story has a happy ending." Why does the writer need to say this?

Part Two: The Pacific Ocean

Chapters 37 – 38

1. How does Yann Martel begin this section of the novel on a surprising and suspenseful note?
2. What important part of the plot does Chapter 38 provide?
3. What does Pi mean when he says, "the ship vanished into a pinprick hole on my map"?
4. How does Martel manage to provide a note of humor even during this tense and suspenseful episode?

Chapters 39 – 40

1. How is Pi's survival more an act of Providence than human action?
2. How does Pi's survival illustrate his belief in the triumph of faith over reason?

Chapter 41

1. How again does Pi attribute his survival more to Providence than human action?
2. How has Martel prepared the reader for the situation in the lifeboat?
3. Why does Pi conclude the sailors threw him overboard into the lifeboat?
4. Why is it fortunate for Pi that the hyena is in the lifeboat?

Chapter 42

1. With what significant imagery and symbolism does Pi describe the arrival of Orange Juice, the Orangutan?
2. How does he continue to describe the orangutan herself?

Chapter 43

1. Why is Pi so confident that he will be rescued? What does this reveal about his personality?
2. How does Pi characterize the hyena?
3. What surprising fact about the hyena does Pi share?

Chapter 44

1. Why does Pi dislike the nighttime worst of all?
2. What happens to the flies?

Chapter 45

1. What evidence is presented that Pi's ordeal is beginning to skew his former values? Why is this change significant?
2. Why does Pi laugh at the sight of Orange Juice's seasickness?

Chapter 46

1. Explain why Pi is not able to identify a "worst night"?
2. What is implied by Pi's now talking about refusing to label a "worst night"?
3. What occurs during this night to make it a candidate for "worst night"?
4. How does Martel enhance the emotional impact of this chapter?

Chapter 47

1. What is the point of knowing that Orange Juice was a discarded pet?
2. What does Pi focus on while watching the fight between Orange Juice and the hyena, especially while Orange Juice is being killed?
3. When does Pi discover Richard Parker?
4. What is significant about the fact that Richard Parker and Orange Juice have names, but the zebra and the hyena do not?

Chapters 48 – 49

1. How did Richard Parker get his name?
2. What surprises Pi about the discovery of Richard Parker?
3. When staring at the hyena, what terms does Pi begin to use when speaking of himself? Why is this significant? What might it foreshadow?
4. On what note does this chapter end? What kind of shift does this represent?

Chapter 50

1. Structurally, why is this the chapter Martel chooses to describe the life boat in detail?
2. How likely is the adult Pi, years after the event, to remember such specific details? Is it important whether or not these details are factual? Why or why not?
3. Compare and categorize the animals with which Pi's boat is populated.

Chapter 51

1. What is ironic about the location of the storage locker?
2. Why does Martel employ so much hyperbole in Pi's description of the water and the rations in the locker?
3. Why is Pi so grateful for the supplies he finds? What does he confess he felt about them?

Chapter 52

1. What is the purpose of this chapter?
2. How accurate can we assume Pi's memory is of the contents of the storage locker? Does it matter?

Chapter 53

1. What is ironic about the rejuvenation the food and water bring to Pi?
2. What change in Richard Parker coincides with Pi's regaining his own strength and lucidity?
3. What turns Pi's outlook around just as he is at the depth of his sorrow?
4. Analyze the language Pi uses to describe Richard Parker.
5. What is ironic about Pi's obvious admiration of the tiger?

Chapter 54

1. What narrative technique, a version of which he used in Chapter 52, does Martel use in this chapter?
2. At what plan does Pi finally arrive?

Chapter 55

1. The transition between Chapters 54 and 55 introduces a technique that Martel will use several times throughout the rest of the novel. What shift in emotions and tone occurs between the end of the one chapter and the beginning of the next?

Chapter 56

1. What does Pi consider to be "life's only opponent"? How is this consistent with other character traits we know Pi to possess?
2. Given what Pi tells the author about fear, why is he telling the author his story?

Chapter 57

1. What is prusten?
2. What is the significance of Richard Parker's prusten in this chapter?
3. Compare the end of this chapter with the beginning of Chapter 56. What is ironic about Pi's thinking?
4. How has Pi prepared us for his decision to "tame" Richard Parker? What do we already know will be the result?

Chapter 58

1. Why does Pi tell us the highlights from the survival guide he finds on the lifeboat?
2. What is significant, in terms of Pi's coming of age, about the fact that he decides no longer to dwell on being rescued? How might the survival manual symbolize this?

Chapter 59

1. Why does Pi go into such laborious detail about the effect of the drag of the raft on the lifeboat?
2. In what ways does Pi realize that he is not alone?
3. Why hadn't Pi noticed the abundance of life in the ocean before? What does he say is the best way to experience wildlife?
4. What is the effect of the personification Pi uses to describe the sunset over the Pacific?

Chapter 60

1. What is suggested by Pi's reference to the Hindu story of the sage Markandeya?
2. What does viewing the ocean at night teach Pi about his predicament?
3. Which two of his faiths does Pi draw on during his nighttime epiphany?

Chapter 61

1. Thematically, why does this chapter immediately follow Chapter 60?
2. What is almost Providential about the arrival of the school of flying fish?
3. How do Pi's myriad faiths interact in this chapter?
4. Why, according to Pi, did he weep over the having to kill the flying fish, yet he killed the dorado triumphantly? What is significant about Pi's second explanation?

Chapter 62

1. What effect does Martel create by having Pi tell the author, "I spied with my little eye a tiger"? How is this effect achieved?
2. In what ways are the solar stills "sea cows"?
3. Why does Richard Parker go back under the tarpaulin when Pi blows his whistle?

Chapter 63

1. How long was Pi shipwrecked?
2. Why does Pi bother to tell us how long others have lasted at sea?
3. Why does Martel rely yet again on the list as his narrative technique?
4. What role does prayer play in Pi's routine? What does this emphasize about his character?
5. What is significant about Pi's admission to not keeping track of time?

Chapters 64 – 65

1. How is Pi's utter inability to control, or even to observe, where his boat goes an ironic contradiction of an earlier realization of his?

Chapters 66 – 67

1. What does the end of this chapter suggest?
2. What benefits does Pi derive from the tiny forms of sea life that develop on and around the raft and life boat?
3. Of what thematic significance is the development of sea life around the raft and boat?

Chapters 68 – 69

1. Explain Pi's circle references and how he determines his odds of being rescued by a ship.
2. What does Pi express about the ambivalence of smell-induced memory?

Chapters 70 – 71

1. On what note does Chapter 70 end? What theme does this emphasize?
2. What narrative technique does Martel again return to while discussing Pi's mastery of Richard Parker?
3. What is the goal of Pi's training methods?

4. What do Pi's concerns about not making Richard Parker too sick and making certain the tiger has enough food and water suggest about Pi's character? What is ironic about this?

Chapter 72

1. Why, according to Pi, did Richard Parker not really want to attack him?
2. How does Pi finally gain the mastery over Richard Parker that he has desired?

Chapter 73

1. What does having a book represent to Pi?
2. Why is Pi so moved by the Gideon Bible he once found in a Canadian hotel room?
3. Why does Pi begin to keep his diary?

Chapter 74

1. Why is it significant that Pi is able to maintain some form of religious devotion even without the trapping of religion?
2. Why does Pi say it was hard to maintain faith?
3. What is the primary theme of this chapter?

Chapters 75 – 76

1. What is the most significant contrast between these two chapters? What theme is Martel emphasizing with Pi's detailed discussion of feces?

Chapter 77

1. Of what is Pi's adoration of turtle flesh, eggs, and the versatility of turtle shells reminiscent?
2. When the biscuits are finished, what does Pi turn to for food?
3. Why does Pi find that the connection between food and emotional well-being is frightening?

Chapter 78

1. What effect is Martel achieving by opening this chapter with descriptions of the "many skies" and "many seas"?
2. Explain the mathematical allusion Pi makes.
3. What does Pi say is "the worst pair of opposites" for someone stranded at sea?

Chapters 79 – 80

1. What is the significance of Richard Parker's encounter with the shark?
2. To what is Pi alluding when he thanks "Jesus-Matsya" after catching the big fish?
3. How does Pi establish his mastery of Richard Parker in this episode?

Chapters 81 – 82

1. What is the actual key to Pi's "dominance" over Richard Parker?
2. At what heartbreaking realization does Pi arrive in Chapter 82? Why is this development significant?

Chapter 83

1. What is the significance of this storm at this point in Pi's narrative?
2. On what note does this chapter end?

Chapters 84 – 85

1. What is the point of Pi's fantasy about the whales?
2. Why is Pi so positively affected by the lightning storm?

Chapter 86

1. What is suggested by the fact that no one on the oil tanker sees Pi?
2. At the end of this chapter, Pi tells Richard Parker that he loves him. Why does Pi love Richard Parker?

Chapters 87 – 88

1. What is the significance of Pi's newfound method of "escape"?
2. What is the point of Pi's encountering the trash?

Chapters 89 – 90

1. What is the point of Pi's having run out of ink before he ran out of paper?
2. What is the symbolic significance of blindness? What might this suggest about Pi?
3. What saddens Pi the most about his continual deterioration?
4. What clue do we have that Pi's account of the episode with the

blind Frenchman might not be precisely factual?

5. What theme does Pi's story about the man finding the banana and feeling better suggest?

6. What happens emotionally to Pi with the death of the Frenchman?

Chapter 91

1. What is significant about how Pi recovers from his blindness?
2. What climactic event occurs in this chapter?

Chapter 92

1. How does Pi justify the episode he is about to tell about his time on the island?
2. Why does Pi rely so heavily on the survival manual's instructions when disembarking onto the island?
3. List some of the mysteries Pi comes to discover about the island.
4. Why does Richard Parker continue killing animals, even after he is no longer hungry?
5. What is the likely symbolic significance of this island?
6. Structurally, why do you think the author chose to place the island episode where he did in the novel?

Chapters 93 – 94

1. Why does Pi and Richard Parker's parting bother Pi so much?
2. Why, according to Pi, is it important to "conclude things properly"?
3. Why does Pi say he turned to God after leaving the island?

Part Three: Benito Juarez Infirmary, Tomatlan, Mexico

Chapters 95 – 96

1. Why have members of the Japanese Ministry of Transport come to interview Pi?
2. What is significant about the numerous difficulties the Japanese men experience in their attempt to get to Pi and interview him? What do we learn about them in their private exchanges in Japanese that the author includes in his transcript?

Chapters 97 – 98

1. What is the purpose of Chapter 97?
2. What element has Martel reintroduced into the novel by presenting translations of the interviewers' Japanese side remarks in his transcript of Pi's interview?
3. What types of characters are the two interviewers?
4. Why do you suppose Pi hoards the cookies?

Chapter 99

1. What point about how people live their lives does Pi make when Okamoto asks why no one else has ever seen the island of algae?
2. Thematically, what is the significance of the rapid and witty exchange between Pi and Mr. Okamoto about the truth of Pi's story? What viewpoints are represented by Pi and the interviewers?
3. How does Pi defend the story of his survival when Mr. Okamoto challenges it as unbelievable? What is his response when Mr. Okamoto protests that he believes only what he sees?
4. If we accept the Richard Parker story as an allegorical account of the factual, literal story, what do each of the characters in the allegory represent?
5. Why do Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba say they think the story with the animals is the better story, even though they admit they do not believe it?
6. What is ironic about the presence of the interviewers in this novel? Why did Martel include them?

Chapter 100

1. Why does Martel never explain the cause of the ship's sinking?
2. What is interesting about the fact that this book ends at Chapter 100?
3. Why is it significant to the theme that the unnamed author learns of Pi's second story from the Japanese interviewers?
4. What is suggested by the closing line of Mr. Okamoto's letter to the author?