About the novel

The author: Yann Martel

Yann Martel was born in Salamanca, Spain, in 1963 to French-speaking Canadian parents. French is still Martel's first language but he prefers to write in English. Because his father, Émile, was a diplomat, Martel lived in numerous countries during his childhood. After completing high school and university in Canada, he travelled and did odd jobs before becoming a writer at the age of 27. Some of what he writes in the Author's note to Life of Pi is true: his first two books did not really make any money and this led to Martel feeling as though he had not accomplished anything. At the age of 33 he really was in India working on his third novel and realised that it was not going to work. What is not true in the Author's note is how he came to write the novel Life of Pi. The narrator tells us that he was given the lead to the remarkable story of Pi's survival by Pi's old family friend who put him in contact with Pi, but in reality Martel was inspired by a review he had read of a novella called Max and the Cats. Once the idea for his own story came to him, he had the outline of it within half an hour. He then spent the next few years doing extensive research on religions, animals and zoos. The truth of how he came to write the novel is certainly less interesting than the version he provides in the Author's note which reminds us of one of Pi's questions “Which is the better story?” This, along with the other important issues that Life of Pi raises, made it such a compelling novel that it soon became an international bestseller. Not only has it sold more than 12 million copies, it has been awarded some of the most prestigious book awards in the world and has been made into a film by Ang Lee. Due to the success of Life of Pi, Martel has been made scholar-in-residence at Saskatchewan University in Canada where he continues to write and where he lives with his wife and three children.

The genre

Life of Pi ticks several boxes in terms of genre, both fiction and non-fiction. In terms of fiction, it is a coming-of-age novel (known as a bildungsroman) as well as an adventure, because it features the journey of a young person. It is a post-colonial novel with its diverse cultural flavour. It is a work of magical realism in which fantasy elements, such as human-like animals and a cannibalistic island, appear in a realistic setting. In terms of non-fiction, the initial Author's note is partially autobiographical, drawing on the experience of author Yann Martel in his backpacking journey through Pondicherry, the extensive commentary on animal behaviour makes it read like a documentary, while the concluding interview scripts are another non-fiction genre. Further, the first-person narration makes it read like a memoir. Martel's clever intertwining of fiction and non-fiction, in a realistic setting, forces the reader to consider the nature of storytelling and truth.
Background and setting

Most of the novel deals with the memories of the main character, Piscine (Pi) Patel, of India, when he is shipwrecked in the mid-1970s in the Pacific Ocean.

Pi Patel’s father, a zookeeper in Pondicherry, India, responds to the unstable political and economic conditions in India during the Emergency by selling the zoo and its animals and moving his family to Canada (see Life of Pi page 8 for a map). This sets the plot in motion.

Though only a short section of the novel is set in India, the Indian culture and spirituality of the main character, Pi, is evident throughout the novel. As a believer of the three most prominent religions in India – Hinduism, Islam and Christianity – Pi provides much insight into Indian spirituality.

India’s diverse culture is further reflected in the setting – a little city in southern India called Pondicherry. While India was influenced by British culture as a British colony for nearly two centuries, the city of Pondicherry was once the capital of French India and thus also reflected French culture.

Pi Patel’s life starts as a blend of Indian, French and British culture and he will be exposed to Mexican, Japanese, and Canadian culture along his journey. Canada, the destination of the migrating Patel family, is the Author’s birth country, and it is where the older Pi resides. The novel begins in the Author’s home context, Canada in 1996, as he struggles to write a novel, and goes back to the 1970s when Pi’s story begins.

The narrators

The novel begins with an Author’s note in which the narrator, who calls himself the Author, speaks directly to the reader using the first person so that we are more likely to believe what he tells us about how he came to write Pi’s story. This initial narrator is partly Martel and partly invention and he creates a frame for Pi’s story. He then proceeds (chapters 1-94) to recount what the adult Pi told him during their year-long interview sessions. Pi’s words are also written in the first person and he is the primary narrator of the story since the majority of the tale (set in the past) is related by him. From some of the Author/narrator’s reflections on Pi’s story, it appears that he is profoundly affected by Pi’s spirituality and this leads him to reflect on the “glum contentment” and “dry ... factuality” of his own life (chapter 21).

In chapter 95, the Author/narrator provides us with a description of how the Japanese investigators travelled to Mexico to interview Pi and chapters 96-99 are a transcription of this recorded interview. The novel ends with a copy of Mr Okamoto’s report that was sent to the Author/narrator. Pi’s story is thus framed by the narratives of two other people, both of which are written in a factual style even though they are also stories. The layered narration or “story inside a story” (all of which, some of which or none of which could be true) reinforces the importance of the theme of storytelling in the novel.

WORD CHECK

first person a narrator who uses “I” and tells the story from his or her perspective

layered narration when one narrator (who may be a character in the story) tells another character’s story in the way it is told to him or her

DID YOU KNOW?
The Emergency refers to a riotous phase of India’s history when Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, responded to strikes and protests by declaring a state of emergency, which gave her absolute power. It was a time of confusion and disorder when Individual freedom was much reduced.

DID YOU KNOW?
Yann Martel has said that he is deeply religious, which shows us that the Author/narrator character in the novel is not necessarily Martel himself.
The structure of the novel

The novel is divided into the Author's note followed by precisely 100 chapters. These chapters are divided into three parts: Parts 1 and 2 in Pi's voice, and Part 3 in the form of a transcribed sound recording. Much of the novel is in the main character Pi's voice. Each part serves to prepare the reader for the next part so that the reader is positioned to suspend any disbelief in favour of “the better story”.

Author’s note

This note works as the introduction to the novel and is in the Author's voice. It is part fiction and part non-fiction, and is printed in italics so that the reader can easily recognise when it is the Author speaking. It begins in 1996. The note explains how the Author found Pi's story and serves as a framework for how the reader understands the novel.

Part 1 - Toronto and Pondicherry (chapters 1-36)

Part 1 is mostly narrated by the older Pi who recalls his childhood. In between are a few italicised chapters by the Author, which act almost as asides, confiding in the reader the Author’s observations of the older Pi. What the reader learns about Pi's first-hand knowledge of animal behaviour and his religious beliefs is essential if the reader is to believe “the story with animals” in Part 2.

Part 2 - The Pacific Ocean (chapters 37-94)

This part, narrated solely by Pi, is “the story with animals”, from shipwreck to landing in Mexico. It covers 227 days, which is nearly eight months. Many view both these events (the shipwreck and then the landing in Mexico) as climaxes. It is the story that Pi tells the Author about how he survives on the lifeboat with Richard Parker, the tiger. Part 2 reveals the conflicts in the novel: the external conflict between Pi and his circumstances; the inner conflict between animal instinct and vegetarianism; and the conflict between faith and science, and faith and despair.

Part 3 - Benito Juárez Infirmary, Tomatlán, Mexico (chapters 95-100)

Part 3 is comprised of the Author's voice and of recordings of Pi's interview by the Japanese officials. The interview takes place on 19 February 1978. When the officials do not believe him, Pi is forced to tell “the story without animals” featuring the gruesome account of murder and cannibalism. Once the officials hear the gruesome reality of the story without animals, they record the animal version as fact, in a poignant conclusion, as these seekers of truth accept Pi’s version of the truth. Part 3 brings the science versus faith conflict to a head, and finally brings resolution as both the officials and, by extension, the reader choose “the story with animals as “the better story”.

WORD CHECK

transcribed an exact written copy of something
asides confidential comments
comprised made up of
poignant causing a feeling of sadness, pity and/or regret
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Present day (1996)</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author's note</td>
<td>Struggling to write a popular novel, the Author goes to Pondicherry, India. Here he meets Francis Adirubasamy who tells him that he knows someone who has a story that will make him believe in God. The Author contacts Mr Patel, the storyteller, who now lives in Canada.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 1 and 2</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada Present day</td>
<td>Mr Pi Patel, now about 40 years old, tells the Author about his education in religious studies and zoology. He remembers being in a Mexican hospital with swollen legs and scarred skin. Pi mentions Richard Parker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 3 to 5</td>
<td>Pi's early life Pondicherry, India Past</td>
<td>Mr Patel begins retelling his story. Father and Mamaji (Francis Adirubasamy) love swimming pools so he is named Piscine (meaning &quot;swimming pool&quot; in French) by Mallot Patel. Mamaji teaches Piscine to swim. His father and mother never learnt to swim. Father runs the Pondicherry Zoo (Zootown). Piscine is deeply fond of animals and lives the life of a prince playing in his menagerie, the zoo. When Piscine leaves St Joseph's School and goes to Petit Séminaire, he changes his nickname from Pissing Patel to Pi because he hates being teased about his name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada Present day</td>
<td>The Author observes that Pi's kitchen is over stocked with a full spice rack, jam-packed cupboards and mountains of cans and packages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 7 to 11</td>
<td>Lessons about animals Pondicherry, India Past</td>
<td>Pi's favourite subject at school is biology. His favourite teacher, Mr Kumar, is a communist and an atheist and views religion as darkness. The zoo is Mr Kumar's temple. Father teaches Pi and Ravi a lesson in the dangers of anthropomorphising the animals. He tells them that they are never, under any circumstances, to touch a tiger. He makes them watch the starved 550-pound tiger, Mahisha, attack and devour a goat. The boys are hysterical. Father tells Pi and Ravi that life always defends itself; every animal is dangerous. Pi describes life at the zoo. The most dangerous animal there is Man because of how people terrorise the animals. Each animal has its own flight distance, which allows it to live comfortably in a zoo enclosure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 12</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada Present day</td>
<td>The Author notes that Pi gets agitated retelling his story. He adds that Pi is a sweet man, tormented by his memories, especially of Richard Parker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 13 and 14</td>
<td>Training animals Pondicherry, India Past</td>
<td>Lions in zoos will not attack people who enter their enclosure because the lions are hungry. Rather, they do so because the people have invaded their territory. This is why lion tamers enter the circus ring before the lions: to establish their territory, which they reinforce with loud noises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 15</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada Present day</td>
<td>The Author notes that every room in Pi's house is adorned with Hindu, Muslim and Christian ornaments. His home is his temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 16 to 20</td>
<td>Pi's religions Pondicherry, India Past</td>
<td>Auntie Rohini introduces Pi to Hinduism, which allows him to understand the universe. According to Pi, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam all believe in their own sort of Karma. Pi is introduced to Christianity while on holiday in Munnar, India. He is drawn to the church because of Christ's humility. Back home, Pi peeks into the Great Mosque and sees Muslims praying for the first time. A quiet Muslim man, Mr Kumar, a baker, introduces Pi to Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 21</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada Present day</td>
<td>Compared to Pi's life, the Author reflects that his life - characterised by glum contentment - lacks purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 22 to 28</td>
<td>Pi's decision on religion Pondicherry, India Past</td>
<td>Pi is pressured by his priest, imam and pandit to choose a religion. His parents agree and Ravi makes fun of his faiths. Pi avoids his religious leaders. He is baptised a Christian and gets an Islamic prayer rug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 29</td>
<td>Father decides to move to Canada - a country far away and unfamiliar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 30</td>
<td>The Author discovers that Pi is married to Meena, which makes Pi seem shy for not showing off what is most precious to him.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 31 and 32</td>
<td>Pi meets Mr Kumar (Muslim baker) and Mr Kumar (biology teacher) at the zoo. On seeing a zebra for the first time, the former marvels at Allah's creation while the latter offers the scientific name of <em>Equus burchelli boehmi</em> for the Grant's zebra. Pi describes zoomorphism, in which animals adopt people as their own kind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 33</td>
<td>Pi shows the Author photos of his life to the east of the Pacific. He has only four photos of his life to the west in India. Pi says he can hardly recall what his mother looks like or remember the sound of her voice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 34 and 35</td>
<td>Father sells the zoo and the animals - many to zoos in America. He prepares them for the voyage by ship across the Pacific. The family says goodbye to India. Mother has a hard time letting go. They leave India on 21 June 1977. Pi is 16 years old.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 36</td>
<td>The Author meets Pi's son and daughter. He learns that Pi has a dog and a cat as well. He acknowledges that this story has a happy ending.</td>
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**PART 1: THE PACIFIC OCEAN**

| Chapter 37 to 39 | The Japanese cargo ship transporting Pi, his family and the animals sinks. Pi uses the orange lifebuoy on the lifeboat to rescue Richard Parker, a three-year-old Bengal tiger, from drowning. Realising that he has brought a tiger aboard, Pi dives off the lifeboat. Later, Pi recounts his experiences of the ship's sinking. He remembers hearing a loud bang on board and subsequently going to the ship's deck. He tries to return to his room, but the stairwell is flooded. He remembers a group of sailors throwing him onto the lifeboat and a male Grant's zebra jumping overboard and landing in the lifeboat, breaking its leg. |
| The Tsimtsum sinks | The Tsimtsum sinks | |
| Tarponia | The Tsimtsum sinks | |
| Past | Past | |

| Chapters 40 to 44 | Pi hangs from an oar he pushes under the tarpaulin on the lifeboat to get away from the sharks below him and the tiger on board. He edges onto the lifeboat and sees a spotted hyena lift its head from under the orange tarpaulin. Unable to explain why the tiger has not killed these animals, Pi realises that Richard Parker must have fallen off the lifeboat and drowned. Orange Juice, a Borneo orang-utan and mother of two male orang-utans, floats by the lifeboat on a ton of bananas in a net. She climbs aboard. Pi takes the net. The hyena grows anxious and runs around the orange interior of the lifeboat yipping. Thinking it will attack him, Pi drops down onto the oar hanging on the side of the lifeboat. Night falls and everything merges into blackness. Noises on the lifeboat instil fear in Pi. |
| The first 24 hours at sea | Oar and tarpaulin | Past |

<p>| Chapters 45 to 47 | Pi is hopeful that he will be rescued and will see his family again. The hyena has ripped off the zebra's broken leg and is eating it. Orange Juice is seasick. Pi roars with laughter. The hyena attacks the zebra, which puts all three animals in a frenzy. As the sun sets, with the animals roaring at each other, Pi realises his family is dead. He weeps into the night. The hyena attacks Orange Juice and beheads her. Fearing for his life, Pi stands up to defend himself against the hyena when he sees Richard Parker hiding beneath him under the bench. |
| The animals get restless | Tarpaulin | Past |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters 48 to 56</th>
<th>Survival and supplies</th>
<th>Tarpaulin Post</th>
<th>Pi is weak from a lack of food and water. He fearlessly begins exploring the lifeboat for supplies. With the tiger aboard, Pi is no longer afraid of the hyena. Richard Parker has saved him. Pi takes stock of the lifeboat. He finds a hatch of supplies. He lists what is on the lifeboat, including cans of drinking water, emergency rations, blankets, solar stills, orange life jackets with orange whistles, rain catchers, a survival manual, a notebook, a boy, a spotted hyena, a tiger and God. With his strength renewed after eating and drinking, Pi realises that he does not want to die. Richard Parker attacks and kills the hyena without a sound. Pi’s survival depends on getting off the lifeboat and away from Richard Parker. Pi builds a raft out of oars, buoys and life jackets and tethers it to the lifeboat with a rope. The ocean between the raft and the lifeboat now acts as a moat around the tiger’s cage. Pi begins hatching plans to kill Richard Parker.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 57 to 70</td>
<td>Learning to fish</td>
<td>Life raft Post</td>
<td>The vastness of the ocean imposes itself on Pi and fear begins to take hold. Pi realises that his only means of survival is the 450-pound, orange cat on the lifeboat. Guarding against Richard Parker keeps Pi alive by distracting him from his fears and despair. He decides to train Richard Parker and jokingly presents the Pi Patel, Indo-Canadian, Trans-Pacific, Floating Circus. He watches the sea life beneath the raft and decides to catch fish and feed Richard Parker in order to train him. First, though, he marks his territory by urinating on the tarpaulin. Pi knows nothing of navigation and – being a vegetarian – little of catching fish. Flying fish land in the lifeboat. Pi struggles to kill one, which he intends to use as bait. Later, he catches a dorado and skillfully divides it. His clothes disintegrate and saltwater boils appear on his skin. He soon learns how to gaff fish and catch turtles. Looking back, Pi is shocked at how savage he has become. He catches a hawksbill turtle by hauling it onto the lifeboat. He kills it and drinks its blood before fleeing to the raft. He describes his daily routine. He must begin training Richard Parker and imposing himself on him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 71 and 72</td>
<td>Training Richard Parker</td>
<td>Lifeboat Post</td>
<td>Pi describes how you should train an animal at sea. By getting the animal to encroach on your territory, you can assert your authority. This involves making the animal seasick while blowing a whistle full blast until the animal associates seasickness with the noise of the whistle. After four failed attempts at training Richard Parker, Pi gets him seasick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 73 to 82</td>
<td>Scarcity of food and water</td>
<td>Lifeboat Post</td>
<td>Life on the raft is hard. Pi keeps a diary and maintains his religious practices: Mass, darshan and puja, and acts of devotion to Allah. Pi runs out of food and water. Both he and Richard Parker become constipated. Pi attempts to eat Richard Parker’s faeces. A dorado lands in the boat. Pi and Richard Parker engage in a stand-off. Pi stares the tiger down and wins the fish. Pi spends less time on the raft now. He eats like an animal, wolfing down his food before Richard Parker can get it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 83 to 86</td>
<td>Remarkable events</td>
<td>Lifeboat Post</td>
<td>A great storm ensues and fills the lifeboat with water. Pi deploys both anchors causing the lifeboat to cling to the mountainous waves. Pi hides under the tarpaulin. He wakes the next morning to find that the raft has been destroyed. A whale appears as if to greet the survivors. Pi imagines that whales have a conversation about him. He catches and eats a masked booby (sea bird). Lightning strikes the ocean and lights up like a tree’s roots beneath the waves. The next strike is closer. It is loud and hot. The lightning reinvigorates Pi, who calls it an outbreak of divinity. An oil tanker appears on the horizon and Pi assumes he is saved as it is heading straight for them. But the tanker fails to slow down and continues right past the lifeboat, almost colliding with it. Pi descends into loneliness and sorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 87 to 91</td>
<td>The blind Frenchman</td>
<td>Lifeboat Post</td>
<td>Pi spends his days in a trance covering his face with a wet rag he calls a dream rag. The lifeboat drifts through an island of trash. Pi writes a message in a bottle and hurts it into the ocean. The sun and salt have eroded everything, including his clothes and the orange of the lifeboat. Richard Parker and Pi go blind from malnutrition. Pi begins talking to himself about the food he wishes he could eat and someone responds. At first he thinks it is a hallucination then later believes it to be Richard Parker. He asks the tiger if he has ever killed anyone. He admits to killing a man and a woman. Pi then realises it is not Richard Parker who is speaking but someone else lost at sea – a Frenchman in another lifeboat. He is overjoyed. Both blind and starving, they row towards each other. Their boats collide. The Frenchman boards Pi’s lifeboat and attacks him, hoping to eat him. Pi begins to warn him, but it is too late – Richard Parker attacks and kills the Frenchman. Pi raids the Frenchman’s lifeboat and finds food and water. His eyesight returns and he sees the torso of the Frenchman but cannot recognise his face as it has been ripped up. Pi uses some of his flesh as bait. He also eats a piece of it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pi sees an island of trees growing out of vegetation without soil. At first he thinks it is a hallucination, and then he tests it and finds that it is real. The island is made of intertwined, tubular plants. He tastes a piece: it is sweet with a salty centre. There are freshwater pools located all around the island. Wary of it, Pi stays in the lifeboat at night. He retains his status as alpha male with Richard Parker when in the lifeboat but fears this might change on the island.

Pi explores the island and finds that it is populated with hundreds of thousands of meerkats. Pi asserts his authority over Richard Parker on the island by training him to jump through hoops. He decides to live on the island and sleeps in one of the trees.

One night the excitement of the meerkats wakes Pi up and he sees dead fish floating to the top of one of the pools. Pi relocates to a larger tree in the centre of the island. Unlike the other trees, this one has produced a single fruit. He peels back its skin – overlapping leaves – to reveal a human tooth. He realises that the island is carnivorous and releases acid at night that kills the fish in the pools and any creature on the ground. He leaves the island with Richard Parker.

The rest of Pi's story is grief, pain and endurance. Life does not leave him.

He arrives on the shores of Mexico and collapses on the sand, too tired to say anything or react with excitement. Richard Parker looks fixedly into the jungle and unceremoniously disappears. Pi weeps, feeling abandoned by Richard Parker and nearly by God.

Villagers find Pi and take him to their village where they bath and feed him. Later he is taken to hospital.

The Author explains that a recorded conversation takes place between Pi and Mr Tomohiro Okamoto and Mr Atsuro Chiba, of the Maritime Department in the Japanese Ministry of Transport. They interview Pi about the sinking of the Tsimtsum.

A week after his arrival in Mexico, Pi, exhausted and hoarding food under his blankets, recounts his story to the two Japanese officials. They begin discriminating his story. Pi argues that just because they have not experienced something like it does not mean it cannot happen. For the purposes of investigating the sinking of the ship, they insist they need to know what really happened. Pi asks if they want another story; one using words that reflect reality; one without animals.

Pi tells them a story of how the ship's cook saves his life by throwing him a lifebuoy and pulling him aboard the lifeboat. Mother survives the sinking of the ship by holding onto the floating bananas. The cook and a Taiwanese sailor with a broken leg are already aboard the lifeboat.

The sailor's broken leg becomes infected, so the cook, a disgusting man, convinces Pi and Mother to help him cut off the sailor's leg. The cook has eaten all of the biscuits and needs the leg as fishing bait. The sailor dies quietly one night and is butchered by the cook. He uses every part of the sailor as bait and eats some of it. With some help from Pi, the cook builds the raft for fishing.

They try to catch a turtle but Pi cannot hold onto it and it escapes. The cook hits him. Mother hits the cook. The cook grows angry. Mother pushes Pi to the raft. In a rage, the cook kills Mother and beheads her.

The next day the cook catches a turtle and offers Pi its blood to drink. Pi boards the lifeboat. They fight and the cook lets Pi kill him. Pi eats his heart, liver and some of his flesh. His solitude begins. He turns to God. He survives.

Pi tells Mr Okamoto and Mr Chiba two stories that account for his 227 days at sea. Neither makes a factual difference to them and neither can be proved. He asks them which one is a better story. They say the one with the animals. Pi says, "And so it goes with God."

In a letter to the Author, Mr Okamoto says that Pi shed no light on the sinking of the Tsimtsum but that his story is unparalleled in the history of shipwrecks. Few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger.

**Illustrated plot summary**

An illustrated summary of the plot follows. It highlights the main events of the story of Pi.
I have a story that will make you believe in God.

That's what fiction is about, isn't it, the selective transforming of reality.

I hope that my telling of his tale does not disappoint him.

What maharajah's son has such vast, luxuriant grounds to play about?

It's Pissing Patel!

Where's Pissing?

Are you Pissing?

Come here children. I have a very important lesson for you today.

Three point one four!

My name is Piscine Molitor Patel, known to all as...

My name is Piscine Molitor Patel, known to all as...

Tigers are very dangerous. I want you to understand that you are never — under any circumstances — to touch a tiger.
At times he gets agitated. It's his own story that does it.

The universe makes sense to me through Hindu eyes.

Despite attending a nominally Christian school ... I knew very little about the religion.

I entered the church, for it was now my house too. I offered prayers to Christ, who is alive.

I challenge anyone to understand Islam and not to love it.

There is no mistake ... I know this boy ... he's a Christian.

I know him too, and I tell you he's a Muslim.

But he can't be a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim ... He must choose.
I would like to be baptised. And I would like a prayer rug.

They're separate religions! They have nothing in common!

That's not what they say!

I loved my prayer rug. Ordinary quality though it was, it glowed with beauty in my eyes.

Baptism had the refreshing effect of a monsoon rain.

The mid-1970s were troubled times in India.

It was announced to us one evening during dinner.

Moving a zoo is like moving a city.

It took well over a year. Moving a zoo is like moving a city.

Things didn't turn out the way they were supposed to.

This story has a happy ending.
The ship sank.

Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu, how good to see you, Richard Parker! Don't give up, please. Come to the lifeboat.

I had a wet, trembling, half-drowned, heaving and coughing three-year-old adult Bengal tiger in my lifeboat. The battle for life was taking place beneath me too.

A head appeared... It was the bear-like, balding-looking head of a spotted hyena.

She came floating on an island of bananas... It was Orange Juice.

I kept one eye on the horizon, one eye on the other end of the lifeboat.
Day 2: The lifeboat

The hyena made a gaping wound in the zebra's side.

It was not only the day that died... but my family as well.

Day 3

Between my feet underneath the bench, I beheld Richard Parker's head.

Day 4: It seems the presence of a tiger saved me from a hyena.

God, give me time.
My options were limited to perching above a tiger or hovering over sharks.

The vastness hit me like a punch in the stomach.

I looked at him full of fearful wonder... I had to tame him... We would live – or we would die – together.

Plan Number Seven: Keep Him Alive.
I bent down, picked up the fish and threw it towards him. This was the way to tame him.

Four times he struck at me with his right paw and sent me overboard.

Four times I lost my shield.

TOOOOOOT!!

THIS IS GOD'S CAT
THIS IS GOD'S ARK!
What I remember are events and encounters and routines, markers that emerged here and there from the ocean of time and imprinted themselves on my memory.

Stop your trembling! This is a miracle. This is an outbreak of divinity!

We've made it! We're saved! Do you understand that, Richard? We're saved! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

I fired off a rocket flare, but I aimed it poorly.
Richard Parker, is something wrong? Have you gone blind?

Goodbye, Richard Parker. I'm sorry for having failed you. Dear Father, dear Mother, dear Ravi, greetings.

My name... is Piscine Molitor Patel... Do you hear me?

What? I hear someone there?

Yes, someone’s there!

What! Can it be true? Please, do you have any food?

No, I don't. You have no food at all?

No, nothing.

Come, my brother, let us be together and feast on each other's company.

My heart is with you.

My sweet brother. I am here.

You're damn right your heart is with me! And your liver and your flesh!

Brother, there's something I forgot to mention.

Don't! We're not -

AAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

... alone.

Something inside me died then that has never come back to life.
I stood rooted to the spot speechless.

I trained him to jump through a hoop I made with thin branches.

If the fruit had a seed, it was the seed of my departure.

How long does it take for a broken spirit to kill a body that has food, water and shelter?
When we reached land... I barely had the strength to be happy about it. Then Richard Parker, companion of my torment... disappeared forever from my life. I was truly alone.

Mr. Patel, it's just too hard to believe!

We were wondering if you could tell us what happened to you. We would like to know what really happened.

Mr. Patel, it's just too hard to believe! What is your problem with hard to believe? Doesn't the telling of something always become a story?

Mr. Patel, it's just too hard to believe! What is your problem with hard to believe?

Mr. Patel, it's just too hard to believe! What is your problem with hard to believe?

So you want another story?

You want a story without animals?
I wouldn't have made it if the cook hadn't thrown me a lifebuoy.

The sailor broke his leg jumping from the ship.

Mother held on to some bananas and made it to the lifeboat.

He died quietly ... The cook promptly butchered him.

He killed her. The cook killed my mother.

Then we fought and I killed him.

And so it goes with God.

Which is the better story?

The story with animals is the better story.

Thank you.

Letter: The story of the sole survivor, Mr. Piscine Molitor Patel, is an astounding story of courage and endurance ... Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea ... and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger.
The plot in time

1930s–1960s

1930s: Mamaji in Paris for 2 years.

1930s: Mamaji in Paris for 2 years.

1-5

1980s

Pi, age 7 learns to swim.

Memory of Richard Parker.

Pi studies sloths.

Changes name to Pi.

Meet Mr Kumar (teacher), Father teaches Pi a lesson with goat and tiger, Pi describes zoo life.

Lion tamer analogy to explain alpha-omega power relationship.

Pi finds religions: Christian, Muslim, Hindu.

Three wise men meet, and Pi stays true to all three religions.

Political instability in India -> Father decides to relocate family to Canada.

The two Kumars meet: science vs religion; zoomorphism explained.

Father sells zoo; family leaves India: 21 June 1977, Pi is 16.


1990s

1996: Author meets Mamaji in India, then adult Pi in Canada.

Adult Pi’s over-stocked kitchen.

Adult Pi agitated by memories, especially of Richard Parker.

Pi’s house described as a temple.

Author compares his life to Pi’s and finds his lack of Pi.

Author meets Pi’s wife.

Pi shows Author photos.

Author meets Pi’s son and daughter. -> this story has a happy ending.

Author explains ch 96–99 are excerpts from the conversation between Pi and the Japanese officials.

Author ends Pi’s story by summarising the official report: Pi survived at sea with a tiger.

Encounter with blind Frenchman.

Pi recuperates on meerkat island.

Pi washes up on Mexican beach: 14 Feb 1978.

Japanese officials interview Pi in Mexico: Pi tells the story with animals (ch 97) and second story without animals.

Part 2

Part 3

About the novel
Language

Yann Martel uses a lot of figurative language – words or phrases that are not meant literally. This creates a richly poetic text.

Idioms

An idiom is a commonly used saying that has a figurative meaning.

"darned... with faint praise" (p. 3)

The Author/narrator describes his first two novels with this idiom, which means to compliment something in such a way that you hint that it is not very good.

"The camel at the zoo was unhazed, but that straw broke Father's back." (p. 83)

The idiom "the straw that broke the camel's back" means that one small thing will not do any harm but the effect of many small things together will eventually become too much to bear. In the case of Pi's father, the political events in India weigh heavily on his mind and induce Gandhi's takeover is the event that finally prompts him to leave.

Metaphors

These are indirect comparisons between two apparently unlike things.

"the history lesson, so alive when the day was young, became parched and dusty." (p. 27)

Here Pi compares his history lessons to a desert, suggesting that the lessons were dull and monotonous.

"Memory is an ocean and he bobs on its surface." (p. 49)

Pi's memories are compared to an ocean, which is a large body of water, and Pi is compared to a small object that bounces on its surface. This suggests that the memories Pi carries are vast and deep and that Pi only touches the surface of them when he reveals his story. (This is borne out by the second story that Pi tells the Japanese investigators, which shows us that Pi has buried a lot of unpleasant memories.)

"I felt I was climbing the side of a volcano and I was about to look over the rim into a boiling cauldron of orange lava." (p. 136)

Pi's movement across the tarpaulin is compared to climbing a volcano; the tiger in the bottom of the boat is compared to a large pot of boiling lava. This comparison shows us Pi's fear when climbing over the tarpaulin with the threat of Richard Parker lurking beneath it.

Extended metaphors

An extended metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things that is continued through two or more sentences in a paragraph or a story or lines in a poem.

"Nature can put on a thrilling show. The stage is vast, the lighting is dramatic, the extras are innumerable, and the budget for special effects is absolutely unlimited." (p. 104)

Both sentences contain the comparison between the storm and a spectacular stage show. This comparison suggests that the storm is entertaining and gripping.

"With just one glance I discovered that the sea is a city. Just below me, all around, unsuspected by me, were highways, boulevards, streets and roundabouts bustling with submarine traffic. In water that was dense, glassy and flecked by millions of ill-up specks of plankton, fish like trucks and buses and cars and bicycles and pedestrians were madly racing about, no doubt honking and hollering at each other." (p. 175)

All three sentences contain comparisons between the busy sea life and city traffic. This metaphor appeals to the senses and creates a clear picture of the busy sea life even if the reader has not been underwater.
Similes
These are direct comparisons between two unlike things using the words "as" or "like".

- "My life is like a memento mori painting from European art" (p. 12)
- "It was as if their tongues were charioteers driving wild horses." (p. 27)
- "A strip of hide came off the zebra's belly like gift-wrap paper comes off a gift" (p. 129)
- "clouds that looked like bunched-up, dirty cotton sheets" (p. 128)

Pi compares his life to a type of painting that reminds us that we are mortal. This shows that after Pi's ordeal at sea, he is very aware of death and the "folly of human ambition" (p. 12).

Personification
This compares a non-living thing to a living thing by giving it human characteristics.

- "Life is so beautiful that death has fallen in love with it" (p. 12)
- "All around me was the vomit of a dyspeptic ship." (p. 103)

When recollecting his will to live, Pi uses the comparison of death falling in love with the beauty of life (like one person falling in love with another) to explain why he refused to give up and die.

WORD CHECK
despondency
hopelessness and dejection
jubilation rejoicing and celebration

DID YOU KNOW?
A memento mori painting is a work of art that contains a reminder that we are all mortal, i.e. we will die. These paintings usually portray beautiful objects, or objects showing ambition and success, with a human skull amongst them.

- "A hasp glittered like a diamond" (p. 141)

Pi compares the hasp — a device that fastens the lid of the supplies box to a gemstone. This indicates that what he finds is precious and greatly valued.

- "blood started flowing through my veins like cars from a wedding party" (p. 143)

Pi compares the blood coursing through his body to cars leaving a wedding. This comparison shows his jubilation after his first drink of water from the cans in the box.
Pun

This is when you deliberately use a word or phrase to suggest another one that sounds the same in order to create humour. Puns usually have a literal and a figurative meaning.

“That I was a swimmer made no waves” (p. 28)

Literally, the phrase “to make waves” means to move water back and forth to create a wave. Figuratively, it means to behave in a way that gets you noticed or talked about. Pi is poking fun at his lack of celebrity status at school. Ravi made waves because he was a talented cricketer and cricket is very important to many Indians whereas swimming gets no attention whatsoever.

Hyperbole

This is an exaggeration used to make a particular point or for emphasis.

“A reserve of food to last the siege of Leningrad.” (p. 31)

This is not literal but shows that the adult Pi is hoarding an enormous amount of food.

“Instead we were three and it was awfully crowded.” (p. 180)

Pi says this when describing the lifeboat having only three occupants instead of the 32 people it was equipped for. Here he means that the combination of himself, the hyena and Richard Parker on the lifeboat was unbearably scary and constraining.

“its eyes and spine would irrigate a desert.” (p. 218)

Pi says this after he catches a huge dorado. Although we know this is not literally true, it conveys Pi’s joy in being able to eat such juicy parts of the fish.

Alliteration

This phonic device is the repetition of a consonant sound at the start of two or more consecutive words or words that are near one another. This device is often used to suggest something particular about a character or thing.

“searing 111are” (p. 40)

During the lesson Pi’s father teaches his sons about not treating a wild animal as a pet, he describes the tiger’s burning gaze with the hissing sounds of the repeated s-sound.

“monstrous metallic” (p. 99)

The nasal sound of the repeated m mimics the menacing sound of the Tsimstum as it sinks.

“the ocean was a smooth skin reflecting the light with a million mirrors” (p. 159)

The repeated s-sound reinforces the image of smooth skin and, along with the way the mouth lingers over the repeated m-sound in “million mirrors”, creates an image of great sensual beauty.

Onomatopoeia

This is when words sound like what they are describing.

“the hissing of the sea as the waves broke” (p. 110)

The s-sound in the word “hissing” is similar to the sound that waves make when they break.

DID YOU KNOW?

The siege of Leningrad was a two-and-a-half year blockade of this Russian city by the Nazi forces during the Second World War. Most of the one million people who perished died of starvation.
Oxymoron

These are words that are contradictory or have opposite meanings yet their juxtaposition reveals some truths.

"You have known the confined freedom of a zoo most of your life, now you will know the free confinement of a jungle." (p. 278)

Sense imagery

This is figurative or special language that appeals to the senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell) and which affect the reader intellectually or emotionally.

Sight

Descriptions of colour allow us to envision how something looks.
- The beautiful "placid explosion of orange and red, a great chromatic symphony, a colour canvas of supernatural proportions, truly a splendid Pacific sunset" (pp. 124–125) is lost on Pi on his second night on the lifeboat.
- "The flame-coloured carnivore" (p. 151) perfectly describes Richard Parker's fur.

Smell

Descriptions of odour enable us to imagine how something smells. In this novel there are many examples of horrible smells that stimulate our pity for Pi.
- After the hyena eviscerates the zebra, Pi wakes up to find that "A foul and pungent smell, an earthy mix of rust and excrement, hung in the air" (p. 127).
- When Pi opens the floating refrigerator he says, "the smell had had the time to develop, to ferment, to grow bitter and angry. It assaulted my senses with a pent-up rage that made my head reel, my stomach churn and my legs wobble" (p. 234).

Hearing

Descriptions of sound in the novel are graphic and add to our horror.
- When Richard Parker kills the hyena, Pi hears "a noise of organic crunching as windpipe and spinal cord were crushed" (p. 151).

Pathetic fallacy

This is when the setting (and the weather in particular) reflects the character's mood or situation.
- "All about me was flatness and infinity, an endless panorama of blue" (p. 160) reflects Pi's sense of how small and lost he feels in the Pacific.
- "I enjoyed my meal as I watched the sun's descent in a cloudless sky. It was a relaxing moment. The vault of the world was magnificently tinted" (p. 174) reflects Pi's contentment.
Names
The names of some of the characters in the novel are significant and were deliberately chosen by Martel (according to interviews he has held) to link to the themes of the novel. Many of the names are **aptronyms**.

**Piscine Molitor Patel (aka Pi)**
Piscine Molitor is named after a fabulous swimming pool in France and he becomes an expert swimmer. This is important because this skill will later save his life, linking his name to the theme of survival. He also ensures his emotional survival as a schoolboy by inventing the nickname “Pi” to save him from the ridicule of his previous nickname, “pissing Patel”, which he had called his “crown of thorns” (p. 27).

His chosen nickname, Pi, is the name for the mathematical symbol $$\pi$$. It is an irrational number that has an infinite number of decimal points that have no pattern, yet this number is used to explain the workings of the scientific, logical universe. This links to the theme of faith because this irrational number suggests that we cannot explain everything rationally.

Also, Piscine is named after a swimming pool, which has a set, finite space, but he is cast adrift on a seemingly limitless ocean. He refers to this aspect of his nickname, Pi, when he says, “To be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle ... Your gaze is always a radius. The circumference is ever great” (p. 213).

Instinctively, Pi wants to create meaning out of his experience even though his nickname suggests that complete understanding of it will always be elusive: “Where we can, we must give things a meaningful shape. For example – I wonder – could you tell my jumbled story in exactly one hundred chapters, not one more, not one less? I’ll tell you, that’s one thing I hate about my nickname, the way that number runs on forever. It’s important in life to conclude things properly” (p. 278).

**Richard Parker**
The zoo’s youngest tiger is given a human name owing to a clerical error. Instead of the name Thirsty he gets the name of the hunter who caught him. This links to the theme of anthropomorphism (see page 34 in this study guide).

Interestingly, Martel has said that he chose the name Richard Parker on purpose because he came across it in three stories (Source: http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Books/story). One is a fictional tale, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket by Edgar Allan Poe, published in 1838, in which two friends survive the capsizing of their boat and eat a third survivor whose name is Richard Parker. Eight years later, a real ship, The Francis Speight, **foundered** and one of the victims of death and cannibalism was called Richard Parker. Then in a curious coincidence, forty years after this, a yacht, the Mignonette, was shipwrecked and its four crew members were cast adrift in the Atlantic. Three of them ate the **comatose** cabin boy named Richard Parker and when they were rescued they admitted that they had killed him in order to save their own lives. As a result they were imprisoned for murder. What these three stories illustrate is that real life and fiction can overlap. Life can imitate fiction and sometimes real events can be so awful that they seem like a fiction.
This links to the theme of storytelling since there is an element of the real in all stories and an element of story in how we relate our experience of what is real.

The Tsimstum

The name of the ship is actually a Hebrew word for contraction or withdrawal. It comes from the Kabbalist belief that God had to absent part of himself in order to create the universe. This links to the theme of faith since the sinking of the ship results in Pi being cast alone where he turns to God for solace. Also, in the absence of companionship, he creates Richard Parker, a fantasy that enables him to survive his ordeal.

Satish Kumar

Both Pi’s biology teacher and his Muslim mentor, the baker, have the same name. This is done deliberately to suggest that they have something in common. Although they may seem like opposites because the Muslim baker believes in God and the teacher is an atheist, Pi claims that they are both men of faith. The teacher places his trust in science and logic, which to Pi is just as much a matter of faith as any religious belief. He calls atheists “brothers and sisters of a different faith” (p. 35). The contradictory similarity and difference between the two Satish Kumars is illustrated when they see the zebra in the zoo. The teacher calls it by its scientific name, Equus burchelli boehmi, whilst the baker declares, “Allahu akbar” (which means “God is Great”) (p. 89). They look at the same creature and see it differently, yet both recognise its beauty.

Symbolism

A symbol is something literal that represents something figurative.

The four animals

These are symbolic of the four people on the lifeboat (if the readers prefer to read the first story as an allegory for the second one). The hyena is a symbol of the cook’s voracious appetite and cruelty, the beautiful zebra represents the injured Taiwanese sailor and Orange Juice is a symbol of Pi’s mother. This leaves Richard Parker, whom we assume to be symbolic of Pi himself.

The island

This represents faith. The island demonstrates that there is often a fantastical element in a story that may be hard to believe. However, if we want to accept the whole story, we have to take a leap of faith at some point.

The colour orange

In Life of Pi, the colour orange is used to symbolise survival. It is also linked to hope. This symbolism is made even richer when the orange objects in the boat begin to fade in the sun. This suggests Pi’s fading hope but also his tenacious clinging to survival. The mind map on the next page illustrates the examples of orange from the novel.
Religion

"It seems orange - such a nice Hindu colour - is the colour of survival" (p. 139)
His religious beliefs give Pi hope.
Every morning and evening Pi says prayers and follows rituals from his three religions. This fills the time but also keeps his faith alive.

Orange Juice

"Her flaming hair looked stunning" (p. 113)
Orange Juice represents Pi's mother. The deep love between them sustains Pi through the first days on the lifeboat.

Sunrise and sunset

"Wormth come only when the sun ... like on electrically lit orange, broke across the horizon" (p. 120)
"The sun was beginning to pull the curtains on the day ... placid explosion of orange and red" (p. 124–125)
Every day that begins and ends represents the triumph of survival.

Lifeboat + objects in it

"the whole inside of the boat ... and most every other significant object aboard was orange." (p. 139)
Almost all the important things Pi uses to survive on the lifeboat are orange.

Richard Parker (RP)

"brownish orange streaked with black vertical stripes" (p. 151)
The colour of RP's fur is mentioned often. Pi's invention of the character of RP as lifeboat companion is a way for him to distance himself from the awful things he has to do to survive.
When the Author/narrator meets the adult Pi, Pi's daughter is holding an orange cat. This shows Pi has survived and built a new life for himself but a smaller, tamer version of RP still lives with him.

Whistles

"Even the plastic, beadless whistles were orange." (p. 139)
Pi uses the harsh sound of the whistles combined with induced nausea to train Richard Parker to fear him as alpha animal. This protects Pi's territory on the boat.

Only the orange flare (representing hope of rescue) proves to be useless.
Themes

The themes of a novel are its main ideas. These are concepts or issues that recur throughout the text so that they form the most important questions the novel is attempting to address.

Anthropomorphism

- When we imagine that animals think and act as humans would, we anthropomorphise them.

- In Life of Pi, the child Piscine treats the animals in the Pondicherry zoo as close friends, even imagining that they talk. He allows the mother orang-utan to search through his hair as if he were one of her children and he allows the elephant to search his pockets.

- There is a contradiction throughout the novel regarding Pi’s tendency to anthropomorphise animals: on the one hand, he keeps stressing their wildness and their biological features that distinguish them from humans and, on the other hand, he uses figurative language that suggests they have human characteristics. For example, when describing his studies of the three-toed sloth he says, “I am not one given to projecting human traits and emotions onto animals” (p. 11) but then ironically he does just that when he describes the sloths as “yogis deep in meditation or hermits deep in prayer” (p. 11).

- This contradiction is most evident in how Pi describes Richard Parker. When we read Life of Pi for the first time, we do not realise that he is a tiger until the revelation on page 101 because, up until then, we are lead to believe that he is a person. This is largely due to the pronouns “he” and “him” that Pi uses when describing Richard Parker (the pronoun usually used for an animal is “it”).

- When Richard Parker’s looks are described, we are told not only about his threatening canines and incredible muscles (suggesting his wild strength) but also his “formidable sideburns” and “a stylish goatee” (p. 151) – terms we would only use for humans. Throughout the experience on the lifeboat, Pi is terrified of Richard Parker because he is a wild animal that can kill him, but contradictorily he keeps talking to Richard Parker as if he were a person. He even imagines the tiger’s thoughts and gives him dialogue such as when they discuss all the food they miss eating.

- It is only when we hear the second story without the animals that we realise that Richard Parker is symbolic of Pi himself and that this is why he has anthropomorphised him. Pi places all the awful things he has had to do to survive onto Richard Parker’s shoulders. For example, in the first story it is not he who killed the blind Frenchman – it is Richard Parker. By laying the blame for the bestial things he had to do onto a predatory wild animal, Pi protects himself from the horrors of which he is capable. This also shows us that humans are equally capable of savagery and cruelty: both humans and animals sometimes have to commit terrible deeds in order to stay alive. Pi says that animals have two imperatives: to avoid enemies and to get food and water (p. 24). On the lifeboat, this is the point to which Pi is stripped down. In the battle for survival, humans have to become like animals.
• There are clues in the first story that Richard Parker is actually Pi. For example, Richard Parker becomes constipated and only defecates once a month, the same as Pi does. At one point Pi is so hungry that when he gobbles down the raw fish he says “this noisy, frantic, unchewing wolfing-down of mine was exactly the way Richard Parker ate” (p. 222).
• The other creature on the lifeboat whom Pi anthropomorphises is Orange Juice. The pronoun used for her is “she” whilst the vicious hyena is described as “it”. It is clear that Pi chose an orang-utan to represent his mother precisely because biologically apes are the closest species to humans (p. 122). His mother’s love and compassion kept her human on the lifeboat and she never degenerated into a bestial state in the way that the cook and Pi did.

Faith/belief in God
• Pi’s faith in God plays a significant role in helping him to survive the 227 days adrift and starving on the lifeboat. Unlike some people who only turn to God when they are in need, Pi has always been a deeply spiritual person. From early childhood he feels a connection with the divine – a connection that goes beyond religion and ritual.
• Pi has an unconventional approach to religion. Most people believe that their own religion is the only path to God and salvation. They see other faiths as false. Pi, on the other hand, is influenced by three religions – Hinduism, Christianity and Islam – and follows the sacred rites of all of them. When the three religious leaders of these faiths (Pi calls them the three wise men) challenge Pi to choose only one faith and live according to its precepts alone, Pi responds, “I just want to love God” (p. 75). Pi thus believes that religion provides a way to express love for God and to feel closer to the creator of the universe.
• Pi does not feel as if religions are really all that different from one another even if they have different ways of seeing the world. This is why he says, “If there’s only one nation in the sky, shouldn’t all passports be valid for it?” (p. 79). He often compares events that take place to stories from the different religions. He also thanks the deities from all three religions whenever something good happens to him.

Territory
• Guarding one’s territory is shown to be a common trait throughout the animal kingdom. All animals have a territory that they mark in some way (usually with their urine). The dominant (alpha) animal usually has control over the boundaries and size of territory.
• One of Pi’s arguments as to why animals in zoos are better off is that they do not have to defend their territories from predators as their cages become their territories (p. 24). Pi also describes human homes as their territories, which suggests that in this respect humans are similar to animals.
• When Pi is stranded on the lifeboat with Richard Parker, establishing the borders of Pi’s territory becomes imperative to his survival. He can only do this if he first proves himself to be the alpha male (p. 168).
• As time progresses the lifeboat becomes just like a zoo enclosure where Pi and Richard Parker are trapped (p. 188).
Survival and the will to survive

This novel shows that the ability to survive despite tremendous odds requires a combination of instinct and strength of will. Pi is determined to survive and he uses all his resources in order to do so. The survival manual aboard the lifeboat also says the will to live is necessary for survival (p. 167).

The table below shows what Pi does to survive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adapt to the surroundings/situation.</th>
<th>All creatures adapt to survive. A sloth survives through laziness and the colour-changing algae that camouflage it (p. 11). Pi adapts to his situation. At first it is difficult for him to kill in order to eat but then he gets used to it (p. 185). Faced with starvation, Pi even eats something humans do not normally eat. He admits to eating pieces of dried flesh of the blind Frenchman (p. 250).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember valuable lessons learnt.</td>
<td>Pi's father teaches them the lesson that a wild animal is dangerous. He does this to ensure their survival (p. 39).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold onto hope.</td>
<td>Clinging onto hope is a way to survive. After he survives the first night, Pi has hope that he will be rescued (p. 120).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not give up the will to live.</td>
<td>Pi's will to survive is key. He says that some, like him, never stop fighting for survival (p. 148).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept you have nothing to lose.</td>
<td>When Pi first realises Richard Parker is on the boat, he finds the courage to look for supplies knowing that he is no match for the tiger (p. 135).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find something to distract you.</td>
<td>Watching the barnacles helps to calm Pi and ease his stress (p. 196).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be mentally strong.</td>
<td>Pi's mental strength keeps him going. When things are particularly bleak, he is rejuvenated when he sees something, however small, in a new light (p. 140).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay active in mind and body so as not to lose</td>
<td>Pi spends time measuring the boat, unpacking the locker, reading the manual, keeping a journal, building a raft, collecting water from solar stills, building a canopy, following a daily ritual of cleaning himself, cleaning his fishing gear, putting things away. Keeping busy takes his mind off his plight (p. 185).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depend on yourself; do not rely on outside help.</td>
<td>When rescue does not happen, Pi realises it is up to him to do all he can to save himself (p. 168).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for the positives.</td>
<td>Pi manages to find a positive whenever there is a disappointment. When flares fail to draw attention, he says they smelled of cumin and reminded him of home (p. 198).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not count the days – go one step at a time.</td>
<td>Pi also does not keep track of time and says that is one reason he was able to survive (p. 190).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep your sense of humour.</td>
<td>Humour also helps Pi to stay positive (a necessary aspect of surviving). When training Richard Parker to respect his territory and see him as the alpha on the boat Pi says he will make the lifeboat rock and roll like Elvis Presley (p. 202).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compete to survive.</td>
<td>Competition also leads people to do terrible things in order to survive. From the second story that Pi tells, it is evident that the cook kills the sailor and Pi's mother in order to preserve himself. Later, Pi kills the cook to save himself. There is a reference to this in the first story with the animals when Richard Parker &quot;tells&quot; him that he killed a man and a woman out of need (p. 243).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold onto your faith.</td>
<td>Faith is linked to Pi's will to survive. He prays five times a day and maintains as many religious rituals as he can while on the lifeboat. Each time he catches a sea creature he thanks God for it and prays for its soul. He tells himself, &quot;so long as God is with me, I will not die&quot; (p. 148).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Storytelling

* *Life of Pi* is a work of fiction, which means that it is only a story. But in the beginning of the novel the Author asks if fiction is not "the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?" (p. 4). This means that even stories contain some truth.
Conversely, at the end of the novel, Pi tells Mr Okamoto and Mr Chiba that even the truth is a story because it is always someone’s narrative – their version of the truth. Thus storytelling is an integral part of life.

- For Pi, storytelling is key to his survival on the lifeboat. He reminds himself of the religious stories he has read, he invents scenarios of rescue and, most importantly, he creates the story of the animals on the lifeboat. Even the survival manual recommends “yarn spinning” (p. 167) as a way to pass the time. In Pi’s case, however, sustaining the story does more than keep him distracted, it enables him to cope with the trauma he endures and the inner turmoil he experiences over the awful things he is forced to do to survive.

- When Mr Okamoto and Mr Chiba tell him that they do not believe his story, Pi says they want a story without animals; one that is bland and unsurprising (p. 293). This is precisely what they want so Pi tells them the second story. However, they are horrified by it (p. 301).

- Pi asks the officials which story they prefer: the one with animals or the one without. They concur that they prefer the one with animals. To which Pi responds “Thank you. And so it goes with God” (p. 306). The novel appears to be suggesting that we readers can also choose which story we prefer. It also seems to imply that our lives are stories that we choose for ourselves – we can choose a life with God or a life without God. Life of Pi is advocating that a life with God and with the love and faith that go with this belief is richer and better.

**Madness**

- The novel suggests that if we are driven to extremes through suffering, we are all capable of doing things that others would consider insane. In this sense, madness is a way of ensuring survival (p. 47).

- When Pi is on the lifeboat, there are a number of times that he equates what he is experiencing to madness. He says that his extreme thirst was enough to make him go mad (p. 136). When he catches a fish that he knows Richard Parker wants, he foolishly stares him down but ultimately wins the fish (p. 219). In addition, he admits that his extreme hunger made him eat some of the dead blind Frenchman (p. 250).

- Even Pi’s first version of what happened to him on the lifeboat can be seen as a crazy story. After all, how would a boy survive living with a Bengal tiger on a lifeboat, let alone master and tame it and even teach it to do circus tricks on a floating carnivorous island? The fantastical story is, once again, Pi’s way of keeping himself alive by protecting himself from the truth. Inventing the imaginative story and creating the character of Richard Parker is also a way to cope with solitude. Pi “hears” Richard Parker speaking to him and concludes he has gone mad (p. 238).
**Piscine Molitor Patel**

**Young Pi**
- Protagonist in India and on the lifeboat in 1970s
- Gentle; kind; loving; vegetarian; religious; animal- and nature-loving; intelligent; practical; determined; sensitive; quick-witted; funny; wise; keenly aware of beauty and colour

**Adult Pi**
- In Canada in 1990s; tells the Author his survival story
- Older Pi's family
  - Meena Patel: Pi's wife
  - Nikhil (Nick): Pi's teenage son - confident
  - Usha: Pi's four-year-old daughter - shy

**The Author**
- Writes the story insightful; honest; enlightening; partly fictitious, partly the real author: Yann Martel

**Teachers**
- Satish Kumar: Pi's biology teacher; polio survivor; odd-looking; triangle-shaped body; scientific; atheist; communist
- Father Martin: Catholic priest; lives in Kunnar; kind; religious
- Satish Kumar: Muslim Sufi; baker; devout; nondescript
- Hindu pandit: Patel family's spiritual leader; offended

**Family**
- Santosh Patel: Pi's father; zoo owner; dies in 1977 when ship sinks; cautious; not religious; modern; firm
- Gita Patel: Pi's mother; killed by cook; book-lover; calm; loving; gentle but firm; courageous
- Ravi: Pi's older brother; dies in 1977 when ship sinks; sports-lover; playful; tease
- Francis Adirubasamy: Pi's honorary uncle; connects the Author to Pi; called Mamaji (respected uncle); champion swimmer

**On the Lifeboat**
- Richard Parker: Tiger; apparent antagonist; Pi's alter ego; dies on the lifeboat; 450 pounds; nine feet long; carnivorous; ferocious; an alpha male submissive to Pi
- Orange Juice: Orangutan; dies on the lifeboat; killed by hyena; maternal; humanlike; when lonely and seasick; courageous
- Zebra/Taiwanese sailor: On the lifeboat; killed by hyena/cook; gentle; young; beautiful; exotic; injured; tormented; vulnerable
- Hyena/French cook: On the lifeboat; French cook/castaway blind; Frenchman; killed by Richard Parker/Pi; ugly; violent; dangerous; unpredictable; carnivorous; cannibalistic; murderous; desperately hungry

**Japanese Officials**
- Tomohiro Okamoto: Japanese Ministry of Transport official; sceptical; impatien; rude; businesslike
- Atsuro Chiba: Okamoto's junior colleague; naive; trusting; inexperienced
Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)

Summary

The protagonist of the story, the adult Pi, is the narrator for most of the novel. His account of the nearly eight months he was shipwrecked at sea as a teenager forms the bulk of the story.

He gets his unusual name from the French word for pool, a contained body of water. His nickname, Pi, named for the irrational number, is what he calls himself in order to survive the relentless teasing at school. (See apotropaics, page 31.)

Pi is intelligent and deep-thinking. As a student of zoology and religion, he is intrigued by the habits and characteristics of both animals and people. He is deeply religious, albeit unconventionally so. His love of zoology and passion for various faiths inform his view of God. His faith makes him keenly aware of the beauty in nature and he has a heightened awareness of colour. This makes him a master storyteller as he weaves elements of his surroundings into his stories. He has a keen sense of humour, often playing with idioms, colour and expression, to enhance his stories.

Sensitive and gentle, Pi is a strict vegetarian who finds it difficult to kill any living thing, even a fish. However, he is practical and determined and discovers that he has the courage and perseverance to do whatever it takes to survive the many months at sea after the Tsimsutsun sinks.

This immense strength of character and determination to cling to life is encapsulated in Pi's alter ego, the tiger Richard Parker, who represents the part of him that does whatever it takes to survive.

Pi's humour, his heightened awareness and his faith enable him to tell a good story, and ultimately help him survive both the shipwreck and his experiences with the tiger.

Meena Patel: The older Pi's wife, whom the Author meets briefly in Toronto.

Nikhil Patel (Nick): Pi's son. He is confident. He plays baseball.

Usha Patel: Pi's four-year-old daughter. She is shy but very close to her father.

Richard Parker

Summary

The Royal Bengal tiger with whom Pi shares his lifeboat. His human captor, Richard Parker, named the tiger Thirsty, but their names were mistakenly reversed in the zoo's paperwork, so the tiger became known as Richard Parker. Weighing 450 pounds (204 kilograms) and about nine feet (about 2.7 meters) long, he kills the hyena on the lifeboat, and later the blind Frenchman. With Pi, however, Richard Parker acts as an omega, or submissive, animal, respecting Pi's dominance. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the tiger is Pi's alter ego, the one who commits the atrocities that help to ensure Pi's survival.

The Author

Summary

The narrator of the Author's note and the chapters in italics. He inserts himself into the narrative at several points throughout the novel. While he is partly fictitious, there are many clues that 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.

KEY QUOTE

"Lord, to think that I'm a strict vegetarian... I descended to a level of savagery I never imagined possible."

Richard Parker

KEY QUOTE

"I love you, Richard Parker. If I didn't have you now, I don't know what I would do. I don't think I would make it. No, I wouldn't. I would die of hopelessness. Don't give up, Richard Parker, don't give up. I'll get you to land, I promise, I promise!"

Pi

KEY QUOTE

"This book was born as I was hungry."

The Author
**Francis Adirubasamy**

The elderly man who tells the Author Pi's story during a chance meeting in a Pondicherry coffee shop. Francis is a business associate of Pi's father, but Pi calls him Mamaji, an Indian term that means respected uncle. He teaches Pi to swim as a child and bestows upon him his unusual name. He arranges for the Author to meet Pi so as to get a first-person account of his story.

**Summary**

**Young Pi's family**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santosh Patel</td>
<td>Pi's father. He once owned a 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 wild animals, but to fear them. Though raised a Hindu, he is not religious and is puzzled by Pi's interest in religion. He responds to difficult socio-political conditions in India by moving his family to Canada. He dies when the Tsirnium sinks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gita Patel</td>
<td>Pi's mother. A book lover, she encourages Pi to read widely. Raised Hindu with a Baptist education, she questions Pi's religious convictions. She speaks her mind, letting her husband know when she disagrees with his parenting techniques. When Pi relates the other version of his story to the Japanese officials, she fits the persona of Orange Juice on the lifeboat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravi</td>
<td>Pi's older brother. Ravi loves cricket, movies and music. He teases his younger brother over his devotion to three religions. He dies when the Tsirnium sinks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pi's teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satish Kumar (teacher)</td>
<td>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 inspires Pi to study zoology in college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Martin</td>
<td>The Catholic priest who introduces Pi to Christianity after Pi wanders into his church while on holiday in Munnar. He preaches a message of love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satish Kumar (Sufi)</td>
<td>A plain-featured Muslim mystic (a Sufi) with the same name as Pi's biology teacher. He works in a bakery and lives in a hovel. Like the other Mr Kumar, he has a strong effect on Pi's academic plans: his faith leads Pi to study religion at college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of three important religious figures in the novel. Never given a name, he is outraged when Pi, who was raised Hindu, begins practising other religions. He and the other two religious leaders are quieted somewhat by Pi's declaration that he just wants to love God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other animals on the lifeboat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>French counterpart</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The hyena</td>
<td>An ugly, intensely violent animal. He controls the lifeboat before Richard</td>
<td>The cook</td>
<td>This is the French cook who is rude to them on the ship. He is greedy, violent and terrified of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parker kills him.</td>
<td></td>
<td>going hungry. After he kills the sailor and Pi's mother, Pi stabs and kills him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The zebra</td>
<td>A beautiful male Grant's zebra. He breaks his leg jumping into the lifeboat.</td>
<td>The sailor</td>
<td>The Taiwanese sailor is young, beautiful and exotic. He speaks only Chinese and is very sad and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The hyena torments him and eats him alive.</td>
<td></td>
<td>lonely in the lifeboat. He breaks his right leg while jumping off the sinking ship and it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>becomes infected. The cook cuts off the leg, and the sailor dies slowly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>The maternal orangutan that floats to the lifeboat on tied bunches of</td>
<td>Pi's mother</td>
<td>A refined and polite lady, she unexpectedly challenges the cook when she learns he has eaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>bananas. She suffers from loneliness and seasickness in a very humanlike</td>
<td></td>
<td>the supplies and intends using the sailor's leg for bait. She attacks the cook when he hits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>manner. When the hyena attacks her, she fights back bravely but is killed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pi. The cook kills and decapitates her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and decapitated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The blind Frenchman</td>
<td>A fellow castaway whom Pi meets by chance in the middle of the ocean. Driven by hunger and desperation, he tries to kill and cannibalise Pi, but Richard Parker kills him first. In Pi's second story, it becomes apparent that the blind Frenchman is also the cook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomohiro Okamoto</td>
<td>An official from the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport who is investigating the sinking of the Japanese cargo ship Tsimtsum. Along with his assistant, Atsuro Chiba, Okamoto interviews Pi for three hours and is highly sceptical of his first account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atsuro Chiba</td>
<td>Okamoto's junior colleague. Chiba is the more naive of the two Japanese officials. His obvious inexperience irritates Okamoto. Horrified by Pi's second story, Chiba prefers Pi's version of his ordeal with animals to his version with people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY QUOTE**

*It's an open question as to what hyenas won't eat. They eat their own kind.*  
*Pi*

*It was the cook's idea. He was a brute. He dominated us.*  
*Pi*

*I underestimated her. I underestimated her grit.*  
*Pi*