

**ENGLISH HL 31 May 2025**

**GRADE 12 LITERATURE NOTES ON: Life of Pi – Part 3**

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| **Human Story and Themes** |

**The Human Story page 294**

* The ship sank.
* Pi swam to the lifeboat.
* Mother held on to some bananas and made it to the lifeboat.
* The cook and the sailor were already aboard.
* The cook ate flies and a rat (Pi admitted he ate some of the rat as well) although there were supplies on the lifeboat. Pi and mother -disgusted by the cook.
* The Taiwanese sailor was also aboard – he broke his leg when he jumped. He was in great pain and Pi’s mother tried to comfort and care for him.
* His leg was infected and the cook suggested that they cut of his leg before the infection spreads in order to save his life.
* The cook later admitted that he cut the leg to use it as bait.
* The cook also admitted to mother that both Pi and him finished the biscuits. Pi’s mother was furious.
* The Taiwanese sailor finally died.
* He was butchered by the cook who utilised every part of his body.
* The cook openly ate dried pieces of meat from the Taiwanese sailor.
* Pi’s mother was furious.
* Pi eventually admitted that they only survived because of the cook (good survival skills).
* The cook eventually gets upset when Pi lost hold of a turtle.
* The cook hits Pi and Pi’s mother gets into a fight with him.
* Mother pushes Pi into the raft.
* The cook eventually be-heads Pi’s mother.
* Pi boards the lifeboat. The cook shares the best part of his food with Pi.
* Eventually they fight and Pi kills the cook with the very knife that the cook leaves in plain sight.
* Pi concludes the story with these words “Solitude began. I turned to God. I survived”.

**The Human Story – Pi’s Counter to Japanese Disbelief**

The reasons the **Japanese officials do not believe the animal story** and request another story and how **Pi makes counter arguments**.

1. They believe **bananas do not float** – Pi gives them bananas and the bananas float.
2. The **impossibility of the floating carnivorous island** (Algae Island) which includes fresh water rodents (meerkats) fish -eating algae that produces fresh water – Pi claims that a Venus Flytrap seems impossible as would a bonsai tree (300-hundred-year-old tree that is two feet tall that can be carried in your arms).
3. Surviving on a lifeboat with a **tiger** – there have been no reports to the Mexican police about sightings of a tiger or the killing of animals by the tiger. Pi mentions that there were several cases of animals who escaped and went undetected.
4. **The blind Frenchman** – the likelihood of two blind men in separate lifeboats meeting in the Pacific Ocean – seems improbable. – Pi retorts so is winning the Lottery.
5. **Meerkat bones** - The Japanese officials find small bones in the lifeboat but imply that those could be from other animals that were on the Tsimtsum. They state that there was no conclusive evidence to show that the bones belonged to Meerkats. Pi counters this by stating that there were no meerkats in his father’s zoo so none could have been on the ship.

**THEMES**

1. **The Nature of Storytelling**

The nature of storytelling itself is woven throughout *Life of Pi*, as the novel is told in a complex way through **several layers of narration**. The real author writes in the first person, as a **fictional author** similar to Yann Martel himself and this author retells the story he hears from the **adult Pi about Pi’s younger self**. At the end, in a **transcript** of an interview which the author provides, the young Pi tells an **alternate story** of how he survived his days at sea, giving a version of events with only **human survivors instead of animals**. He also **possibly invents the animal version of his story as a way of finding more truth in his ordeal – as well as staying sane by retelling his gruesome experience in a more beautiful way.** The larger question raised by the novel’s framework is then about the **nature of truth in storytelling**. Link to the blurred lines between **fact and fiction**. Pi values atheism as much as religion but he chooses to subscribe to **three religions because of the truth and beauty** he finds in their **stories.** Mamaji is a great **storytelle**r. **Pi’s mother** is an **avid reader** and Pi probably developed his **love of reading** from his mother.

**Activity 1**

List the several layers of narration in *Life of Pi:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. The transcript gives an alternative version to the animal story which is the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. What could be the reason Pi invented the animal story? To remain \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and to retell his\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in a more beautiful way.
4. The question that arises is the nature of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in storytelling.
5. One of the reasons Pi ascribes to 3 religions is because of the truth and beauty in their \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. **Survival**

Much of the action of *Life of Pi* consists of the **struggle for survival** against **seemingly impossible odds**. Pi is stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific for **227 days**, with only an **adult Bengal tiger** for company. Therefore, his ordeal involves not just **avoiding starvation** but also **protecting himself from Richard Parker**. Pi is soon forced to **give up his lifelong pacifism** and **vegetarianism** as he has to **kill and eat fish, turtles, drink turtle blood, eats faeces** and even resort to **cannibalism**. In a similar vein **Orange Juice**, the **peaceful orangutan**, becomes **violent when facing the hyena** and **Richard Parker** submits to being **tamed** because **Pi gives him food**. In this way Martel shows the extremes that living things will go to in order to survive, sometimes **fundamentally changing their natures**.

The struggle to survive also leads the **characters to commit deeds** of both **great heroism and horrible gruesomeness**. Pi finds an amazing resourcefulness and **will to live** within himself and he resolves to **live peacefully alongside Richard Parker instead of trying to kill the tiger**. When he leaves algae island, Pi even waits for Richard Parker to return to the lifeboat before pushing off. From the start, we know that Pi will survive his ordeal, as he is telling the tale as a **happy adult** but his constant struggle to stay alive and sane maintains the tension throughout the book.

**Activity 2**

1. Pi has to face seemingly \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_ while stranded on the lifeboat.
2. During Pi’s ordeal he has to avoid \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ himself from Richard Parker.
3. In Pi’s quest for survival Pi has to give up his lifelong \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Pi resorts to the following: eat fish and turtles, drink \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ blood, drank urine, ate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and even resorts to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
5. Orange Juice was a peaceful orangutan becomes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when she faced the hyena.
6. Richard Parker submits to being \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_in order to be given \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
7. Martel shows that animals will change their \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in order to survive.
8. In the quest for survival characters commit deeds of great \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as well as horrible

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Pi resolves to allow Richard Parker to \_\_\_\_\_\_ and this contributes to Pi’s survival.
2. **Religion and Faith**

**Francis Adirubasamy** first presents Pi’s tale to the fictional author as “*a story to make you believe in God,*” immediately **introducing religion** as a crucial theme. Pi is **raised in a Hindu family** (family **do not actively practice the religion**) then also converts **to Christianity and finally to Islam**. He **practises all of these religions at once (syncretism)** despite the protests of his three religious’ leaders (three wisemen), who assert that their religion contains the whole and exclusive truth. Instead of dwelling on divisive dogma (religious teachings), **Pi focuses on the stories of his three faiths and their different pathways to God**. He reads a story of **universal love in all three religions**. In fact, it seems that faith and belief are more important to Pi than religious truth, as he also **admires atheists for taking a stand**. It is only **agnostics** that Pi dislikes, as they **choose doubt** as a way of life and never choose a better story.

When he is stranded at sea, Pi’s faith is tested by his extreme struggles but he also experiences and appreciates the lavishness (abundance) of his surroundings. All external obstacles are stripped away, leaving only an endless circle of sea and sky and one day he rejoices over a **powerful lightning storm as a “miracle**”. After his rescue, Pi returns to the concept of faith. He tells his interviewers two versions of his survival story (one with animals and one without) and then asks which one they prefer. The officials disbelieve the animal story but they agree that it is the more compelling and memorable of the two. Pi responds with “*so it goes with God*,” basically saying that **he chooses to have religious faith because he finds a religious worldview more beautiful.** The **“facts” are unknowable concerning God’s existence**, so Pi chooses the story he **likes better, which is the one involving God**.

 Activity 3

1. Mamaji introduces the theme of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the author’s note.
2. The religious leaders are referred to as the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Pi sees the universal \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in all three religions.
4. Pi admires atheist as they believe in science but dislikes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who choose to doubt.
5. Pi describes a lightning storm as a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
6. Pi believes the animal story is more compelling and memorable likewise the story with God is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ story.

## **Science and Religion**

The theme of science and religion as **not opposed but in concert with each other** is present primarily in the **framing of the narrative**. It is exemplified in **Pi’s dual major at the University** of Toronto of **Religion and Zoology**, which he admits he sometimes gets mixed up, seeing **the sloth that he studied as a reminder of God’s miracles**. Similarly, Pi’s favourite teacher, **Mr. Kumar, sees the zoo as the temple of his atheism**. The theme of the connection between science and religion also is related to Pi’s respect for atheists, because he sees that they worship science as he worships God, which he believes is not so very different. **Mr Kumar, the Muslim mystic represents the religious aspect**. The fact that **both men are named Satish Kumar is no coincidence.**

**Activity 4**

The following aspects highlight the theme of Science and Religion:

1. Pi’s majors are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. The two-\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is the topic of his thesis.
3. Pi respects atheists because they believe in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. The incident with the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at the zoo highlights how an animal can be appreciated from a religious point of view as well as a religious point of view.

## **5. Loss of Innocence**

The theme of **loss of innocence** in Life of Pi is closely related to the theme of the primacy of **survival**. Its significance is reflected in the geographic structure of the book—in **Part 1**, Pi is in Pondicherry, and there he is **innocent**. In **Part 2**, Pi is in the Pacific Ocean, and it is there that he **loses his innocence**. That Part 2 begins, not chronologically with the Tsimtsum sinking, but with Pi inviting Richard Parker onto the lifeboat, also reflects this, for it represents Pi reaching out for what Richard Parker symbolizes—his own survival instinct. And it is **this survival instinct** that is at the **heart of Pi’s loss of innocence**; it is this survival instinct that drives him to act in ways he never thought he could.

Throughout Part 2 there are other **representative moments of a loss of innocence**, besides the **symbolic one of bringing Richard Parker onto the lifeboat**. The most important of these is the **death of the Frenchman**, which Pi describes as **killing a part of him** which has never come back to life. That part can certainly be read as his innocence.

**Activity 5**

1. The theme of Loss of Innocence is related to the theme of the primacy of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Part 1 portrays Pi as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ while Part 2 Pi \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Pi’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is the heart of Pi’s Loss of Innocence.
4. What incident resulted in Pi feeling that it “killed a part of him” – the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Very Important Chapters**

Chapter 37 – Ship Sinks

Chapter 90 – Blind Castaway

Chapter 92 – Algae Island

Chapter 94 – Pi reaches Mexico

Chapter 99 – Human Story