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## *Life of Pi*—Yann Martel

**Due Date: February 3, 2014**

### 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 the 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?



## **Chapter 2**

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

## **Chapter 3**

15. What might the origin of Patel's name foreshadow?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
16. What significant trait did the author and Mamaji share?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
17. Who is the man Patel calls Mamaji, who teaches Patel how to swim? Have we already met him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
18. What does the name "Mamaji" mean?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
19. What distinction does Mr. Patel make between the ocean and a swimming pool? What is the significance of this distinction?

20. In this chapter, we finally learn the full name of our narrator. What is it and how did he get it?

21. What is significant about the narrator's name?

22. What did Piscine's father do for a living?

#### **Chapter 4**

23. What did Piscine's father do before he became a zookeeper? What comment does Piscine make about the transition from hotel owner to zookeeper?

24. How does Pi feel about growing up in a zoo? In terms of a Bildungsroman narrative, what might the zoo symbolize?

25. What is Piscine implying when he says that the only "relentless imperatives" felt by animals is avoiding enemies and securing food and water?

26. What is Piscine implying when he says that "a house is compressed territory, where our basic needs can be fulfilled close by and safely?"

27. Does Piscine believe animals are better off in the wild or in a zoo?

28. 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?

29. What does Pi mean when he says that “certain illusions about freedom plague” both zoos and religion?

## **Chapter 5**

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

31. What does Pi mean at the end of this chapter when he says, “in that elusive, irrational number which scientists try to understand the universe, I found refuge?”

32. What personal characteristics does Pi exhibit in choosing to change his own name?

## **Chapter 6**

33. What does the author’s description of Patel’s kitchen suggest?

## **Chapter 7**

34. What language and imagery does Pi use to describe Mr. Kumar? Why is it significant?

35. Why does Mr. Kumar love the zoo?

36. What does the zoo represent to Mr. Kumar?

37. Why does Mr. Kumar not believe in God?

38. Why doesn't Pi argue with Mr. Kumar about the existence of God?

39. How are atheists like believers, according to Pi?

40. What problem does Pi have with agnostics?

## **Chapter 8**

41. 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?”

42. What does Pi mean when he says, “The obsession with putting ourselves at the centre of everything is the bane of not only theologians but also of zoologists?”

43. 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 the episode foreshadow?

## **Chapter 9**

44. What is a “flight distance?”

45. Why is an understanding of animals’ flight distance important to a zookeeper?

## **Chapter 10**

46. What are some of the reasons Pi gives for animals wanting to escape from zoos?

47. Why does Pi go into such detail explaining how zoos work?

48. What, according to Pi, does “an animal hate above all else?”

### **Chapter 11**

49. What happened to the leopard that escaped from a zoo in Zurich in the 1930s, and what does the story illustrate?

50. What might Pi mean by the following: “And they expected to find—ha! In the middle of a Mexican tropical jungle, imagine!”

### **Chapter 12**

51. What does the narrator’s saying that Pi Patel “bobs” on the “ocean of memory” foreshadow?

52. Who is Richard Parker who “preys on [Pi Patel’s] mind”?



### **Chapter 13**

53. Why is Mr. Patel still spending so much time discussing animal behavior and how humans gain “control” over dangerous wild animals?

54. 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**

55. Why is the animal with the “lowest social standing” also easiest to train?

### **Chapter 15**

56. What can be inferred by the religious artifacts that the author sees in Mr. Patel’s house about the person who lives in that house?

57. What is the tone of his language as he describes the religious objects?

### **Chapter 16**

58. Explain Pi’s concept of the Brahman nirguna.

59. What is Brahman suguna?

60. What does Pi say made him a Hindu?

61. What is the point of Pi's tale of Krishna and the milkmaids?

### **Chapter 17**

62. What confuses Pi about Christianity?

63. According to Father Martin, what is the key to the entire Christian story?

64. What does Pi like most about Christianity? How does he compare it to his own Hinduism?

### **Chapter 18**

65. Compare the ways Pi comes to know Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.

66. What first impresses Pi about Islam?

### **Chapter 19**

67. Why does Pi like praying in the mosque?

68. What, then, do each of Pi's three religions give him?

### **Chapter 20**

69. What is ironic about the Muslim baker's name? What is Martel suggesting by naming him this?

70. What two intensely religious experiences does Pi describe in this chapter? Why are they significant?

### **Chapter 21**

71. What impact is his growing friendship with Mr. Patel having on the fictional author?

72. What do the phrases, “dry, yeastless factuality” and “the better story” suggest?

### **Chapter 22-23**

73. 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?

74. To whom does Pi refer when he speaks of “the (three) wise men?”

75. What is Pi’s father’s attitude toward religion?

76. What is ironic about the meeting of the three religious men?

77. Briefly outline each religious man’s argument against the other two religions. What is the point of this scene?

78. What is the power of Pi’s response to the competing religious men?

79. On what kind of note does this chapter end?

### **Chapters 24-25**

80. Why does Yann Martel make this chapter about Ravi's teasing Pi so short, with relatively few examples and a general dismissal at the end?

81. What ironies does Pi point out in this chapter?

### **Chapter 26**

82. What is the primary conflict in this chapter, represented by Pi, his father, and his mother?

83. What is it that causes Pi's mother to look weary and to sigh, "Good grief" by the end of this chapter?

### **Chapter 27**

84. In addition to religion, what outside influence begins to impose itself on Pi's family in this chapter? What plot event is clearly foreshadowed?

85. What biological theory does Mr. Patel's attitude toward technology resemble? Why is this significant?

### **Chapters 28-29**

86. To what does Pi compare his baptism—being sprinkled with a beaker-full of water?

87. What causes the Patel family to leave India?

88. Why does Pi make a point of telling us the animals' reactions to the political situation in India?

### **Chapter 30**

89. What is the surprise that Pi has for the writer at his home?

90. Why has Pi not mentioned that he is married?

91. What does Pi's wife do for a living?

### **Chapters 31-32**

92. What is the significance of the meeting of the two Mr. Kumars?

93. What point(s) is Pi establishing with his accounts of zoomorphism and unusual cohabitations of prey and predator?

94. Why does zoomorphism occur? What does Pi explanation foreshadow?

### **Chapters 33-34**

95. What is suggested by Pi' telling the author that everything from before the family's emigration was "lost?"

96. What do we learn about Richard Parker from the photograph that Pi shows the author?

97. What is, ironically, the difference between the author's account (in italics) and Pi's?

### **Chapter 35**

98. How old is Pi when he and his family embark for Canada?

99. What 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**

100. What surprises the narrator in this chapter?

101. 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?