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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



## Life of Pi

by Yann Martel

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain what an *allegory* is and how the term applies to this book.
2. discuss the idea of territory, both as it relates to animals and humans, and explain how place shapes Pi's idea of himself.
3. discuss the intersection of science/reason and religion/faith in the book.
4. explain the book's ideas on the value of storytelling, giving examples from the book.
5. discuss the idea of an unreliable narrator and explain why the author may choose to use one.
6. analyze the use of different storytelling structures and points of view in the book.
7. trace Pi's coming-of-age in the story, noting key points in his growth and development.
8. describe the ideas of nature and a natural order presented in the book, especially as contrasted with chaos.
9. explain the animal/human dichotomy and give some examples of things that represent it in the book.
10. understand the importance of details to Pi's physical, mental, and spiritual survival, and to his idea of religion in general.
11. discuss the idea of freedom for both humans and animals and say whether, in the book's final estimate, it is a desirable condition.
12. explain the importance of names in the book, giving relevant examples.
13. describe important failures of communication in the book and explain what theme they contribute to.
14. point to instances of foreshadowing and parallelism in the book.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Compare and contrast the two Mr. Kumars: Mr. Kumar, the devout Muslim, and Mr. Kumar, Pi's teacher.
2. How does Pi change from the beginning of the book to the end? Write an essay in which you explain what has happened to Pi and how those events changed Pi as a person. Be sure to use plenty of examples to support your ideas.
3. Religion plays a major role in this book. Explain how religion affects Pi's life.
4. Pi tells two stories about being shipwrecked. Which of them is the most likely to be true? Summarize both of Pi's stories, then explain which is most likely to be true and why it is most likely to be true.
5. Write a character study of Richard Parker. What are some of his physical and intellectual attributes? How do these attributes affect the story?
6. What are some of the things to which Pi can attribute his survival? Write an essay in which you detail what, physically and mentally, helped Pi to survive the shipwreck.
7. The mysterious island on which Pi and Richard Parker land can be taken as an allegory, or a symbolic representation of something. Explain what the island represents in *Life of Pi*.
8. Pi loses all of his family members in the shipwreck. What was Pi's relationship with his family? Does Pi have a loving family background, or is he estranged from his family? Write an essay in which you describe Pi's relationship with his family.
9. There are many instances in this novel in which Pi compares humans to animals. Using specific examples, explain, from Pi's point of view, how humans compare to animals.
10. Yann Martel says that "fiction is about...the selective transforming of reality." (Pg. VIII) Explain why this is true and how a novelist goes about "transforming...reality" to create good fiction.
11. From the very beginning of *Life of Pi*, the main character stresses that one only need look to nature to find evidence that God exists. As Pi Patel, write a speech in which you explain how nature proves the existence of God.
12. Throughout the novel, Martel shifts viewpoints back and forth. Describe these shifts in viewpoint and explain how they help to enhance the story.

# Life of Pi

## Author's Note

### VOCABULARY

**crux** – a central point  
**fiasco** – a disaster  
**illogical** – defying reason  
**obscurely** – vaguely  
**purveyors** – suppliers or sellers of something

1. Who is the first speaker in the book? What kind of person does he seem to be? How can you tell?

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2. Do you believe everything the narrator says in the “Author’s Note”? How reliable do you think he is? Why?

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3. Why did the author go to India?

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**PART ONE: Toronto and Pondicherry****CHAPTER 1****VOCABULARY**

**acuity** – sharpness

**agnostics** – people who do not believe it is possible to know whether God exists

**blanched** – turned pale

**cosmogony** – a model of the origin or creation of the universe

**elicited** – drew out or evoked

**indolence** – laziness

**intriguing** – arousing curiosity; fascinating

**Kabbalist** – a person who studies a form of mystical Judaism

**repose** – rest

**trifling** – insignificant

1. Why did the person speaking in chapter 1 choose to study the sloth? Taken with the information we got in the Author's Note, what might you surmise about this person?

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2. What we can determine about Mr. Patel from his tone?

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3. What cities does Mr. Patel say he would like to visit?

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**CHAPTER 7**

## VOCABULARY

**akin** – like

**atheist** – a person who does not believe in God

**avowed** – sworn

**bane** – poison

**carrion** – decaying flesh

**Communist** – someone who subscribes to the political philosophy that all materials should be equally shared by members of society

**contrite** – repentant; regretful of one's actions

**daubed** – smeared

**deluded** – tricked

**implored** – begged

**jowls** – the lower part of the cheeks

**organic** – produced without the aid of chemicals; natural

**proffered** – gave

**venerable** – sacred

1. Analyze the description of Mr. Kumar in this chapter. What language and imagery does Pi use to describe him?

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2. Why does Mr. Kumar love the zoo?

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3. Explain what animals represent to Mr. Kumar and how his views on animals differ from Pi's.

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