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Life of Pi
BY YANN MARTEL


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ISBN 978-1-60389-260-5
Item No. 303040

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Identifying the Narrator

Objectives: Determining how a narrator may unintentionally alter events in a story
Analyzing diction and metaphor to characterize the narrator

Activity

The writer of *Life of Pi*, a fictionalized version of Yann Martel, goes to India in the hope that the trip will give him inspiration for his novel about Portugal. Unfortunately, he soon discovers that while the novel he is writing has interesting dialogue, realistic characters, and colorful descriptions, it is lacking “that spark that brings to life a real story.”

Fortuitously, Martel encounters a native Indian man named Mr. Adirubasamy, who promises him a story that will make him believe in God. The story, however, is not his, but belongs to a man named Mr. Patel, who now lives in Martel's home country of Canada. The writer contacts Mr. Patel and, so moved by the story, develops it into a novel.

Through reading the Author's Note of *Life of Pi*, the reader learns that the story the fictional writer will be telling is not his own, but is, instead, the story of a person named Mr. Patel. Martel warns the reader that his retelling of the story may not be accurate and “any inaccuracies or mistakes are [the writer's.]”

The Author's Note presents an interesting dilemma: The writer claims that the story is true, with the exception of a few errors, but the fact that the tale is filtered through a narrator with particular values, viewpoints, and ideas gives the text an inevitable slant. Although Martel tries to be objective and tell the story through Pi Patel's point of view, the writer's own experiences and beliefs unintentionally alter the text.

Use the chart that follows to characterize the writer. Re-read the Author's Note, and in the first column, record words or phrases that suggest who and what kind of person the writer is. In the second column, write what qualities and experience underlie those particular statements. Finally, in the third column, write how those experiences or qualities might affect the veracity of the story. An example has been provided for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 4

Writing a Letter

Objectives: Forming a persuasive argument
Synthesizing facts presented in the text
Writing from a character's point of view

Activity

Pi's family owned and operated the zoo in the Pondicherry Botanical Garden, and through his experience, Pi developed a love for animals and a knowledge of zoology and keeping animals.

One of the things Pi says which may shock some readers is that animals are happier in the zoo than they are in the wild, and he supports his argument with several observations about animal behavior.

Compose a list of the facts that Pi presents. Then, write a letter to an animal rights agency that advocates closing zoos and taking animals out of captivity. Use the facts that Pi provides in this chapter to support an argument that animals are more content in zoos than in the wild.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 5-7**Allusion Chart**

Objective: Identifying and analyzing allusion in literature

Activity

In *Life of Pi*, the narrator uses a lot of allusion in his story. Allusion can be a powerful literary device if the reader can make the connection between the reference and the story. In a story that actively discusses religion and science, allusions help to convey themes and motifs in the work.

The key to interpreting allusion is identifying the reference and then understanding how the reference supports the ideas in the novel.

Form small groups and review Chapters 5-7. Identify as many allusions as you can, and list them on the following chart. Write the allusion in the left column. In the middle column, identify what or who is being referenced in the allusion. If you are not familiar with the reference, you may consult the Internet or library resources. Within your group, discuss the possible significance of the allusion to the story, and write it in the right column. The first one has been done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 15

Theological References

Objective: Determining the significance of religious references

Activity

The fictional Yann Martel observes the decoration in Pi's home and describes in detail the various pieces of art that portray religious icons. While the writer is familiar with the various figures from different religions, the reader may not be.

Using the book and Internet or library resources, identify who each figure is and what it represents. In the second column, write what religious system to which it belongs. Then, in the third column, list some particular values that the figure represents. Finally, in the fourth column, write how Pi's possession of the different religious pictures and statues help characterize him.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 18-20**Character Comparison**

Objective: Using a Venn diagram to compare and contrast characters

Activity

According to Pi, it is not much of a coincidence that the Sufi baker and Pi's biology teacher have the same first and last name, since Satish Kumar is a relatively common name in Tamil Nadu. It is also no coincidence, from the perspective of literary technique, that both Mr. Kumars have had positive influences on Pi.

In the Venn diagram on the following page, compare and contrast the characters of Mr. Kumar the biology teacher and Mr. Kumar the baker.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 26-28

Making a Prayer Rug

Objective: Responding creatively to ideas presented in the text

Activity

Pi's prayer rug becomes an important part of his spiritual practices. As Pi describes his rug in the first paragraph, the reader can note the sense of attachment he has to it:

I loved my prayer rug. Ordinary in quality though it was, it glowed with beauty in my eyes. I'm sorry I lost it. Wherever I laid it I felt special affection for the patch of ground beneath it and the immediate surroundings, which to me is a clear indication that it was a good prayer rug because it helped me remember that the earth is the creation of God and sacred the same all over....

Pi's rug has gold lines on a red background, as well as a qibla, which is supposed to point toward the Muslim holy city of Mecca. Even the soft pile and the tassels of the carpet remain sharp in his memory. Pi's prayer rug was one of his greatest treasures.

Design your own rug that you could lie or kneel on when you pray, meditate, daydream, or rest. Before you begin, consider what size you want your rug to be, and what colors, patterns, materials, and ornamentation you would choose. Write a detailed description of your rug that will provide a vivid image of it to the reader. Include an explanation for the choices you made. Your description should be a least a half a page long.