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Individual Learning Packet

Advance Placement Teaching Unit

Life of Pi

by Yann Martel

written by Rebecca Grudzina

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Life of Pi

Objectives

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

1. analyze the allegorical elements in the novel.
2. trace the development of motifs like the nature of truth, the will to survive, the nature of faith, etc.
3. discuss the intersection of reason and faith in the book.
4. examine the elements of the *bildungsroman* in the novel.
5. explain the significance of Pi's names and nicknames throughout the novel.
6. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
7. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
8. offer a close reading of *Life of Pi* and support all assertions and interpretations

Lecture Notes

Narrative Perspective

Life of Pi is a novel that includes a frame narrative. Piscine “Pi” Molitor Patel, the main character and narrator of the bulk of the novel, is interviewed by the unnamed, fictitious author. This author’s portions of the novel are printed in italics to distinguish them from the sections that are in Pi’s own words.

The issue of narration becomes even more important at the end the novel when the reader is introduced to a third narrative voice, the transcript of Mr. Okamoto’s interview with Pi in the hospital.

The fact that the reader hears two distinctly different accounts of Pi’s experiences—neither of them from Pi directly—emphasizes Martel’s theme of the incomprehensibility of truth and the ephemeral nature of truth.

Themes, motifs, symbols, allusions, and references

Pi—Pi’s name is a shortening of his given name Piscine (after a popular swimming pool in Paris, France). And, as he informs his teachers and classmates in Chapter 5, Pi is also the name of the number used to calculate circumferences and areas of circles π (*pi*).

One of the earliest approximations of pi was 22/7. Pi floated on the ocean for 227 days. While in his lifeboat, Pi is the center of his own circle. He himself calls his gaze “a radius.”

Often noted as 3.14, *pi* has so many decimal places that the human mind cannot accurately comprehend it. It continues on to infinity, a fact that troubles Pi because he prefers closure, symmetry, a book with exactly one hundred chapters.

Richard Parker—The tiger Richard Parker, got his name due to a clerical order when he was shipped to the Pondicherry Zoo. Yann Martel chose this name as a reference to a character in Edgar Allen Poe’s only complete novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). The story tells of four shipwrecked men who, after several days at sea, nearly perish and draw lots to decide which one of them should be killed and eaten. The cabin boy, named Richard Parker, draws the short straw.

Coincidentally, 46 years after Poe’s novel was published, nearly the exact events Poe wrote about actually came to pass. While sailing to Australia, a Captain Dudley and three sailors were stranded in a skiff in the Pacific after their yacht, the *Mignonette*, sank. As in Poe’s novel, they are forced to eat one of their party to survive—a young man named Richard Parker. Yet another Richard Parker died when his ship, named the *Francis Spaight*, sank in January 1846.

Richard Parker symbolizes Pi's basic animal instincts. While on the lifeboat, in order to stay alive, Pi must behave in ways that he would have found unthinkable in his normal life. An avowed vegetarian, he must kill fish and birds, eat their flesh, and drink their blood. As time passes, he becomes more savage about it, stuffing his food into his mouth the way Richard Parker does. After Richard Parker mauls the blind Frenchman, Pi uses the man's flesh for bait and even stoops to cannibalism. In the second story Pi tells the Japanese investigators, he is Richard Parker and kills his mother's murderer. Richard Parker is the version of himself that Pi has invented to make his story more acceptable to both himself and his audience. The brutality of his mother's death and his own shocking act of revenge are too much for Pi to deal with, and he finds it easier to imagine a tiger, rather than himself, as the killer.

The Will to Live—*Life of Pi* is a story about fighting to stay alive in the face of apparently insurmountable odds. The inhabitants of the lifeboat don't simply succumb to fate; they fight against it. Pi abandons vegetarianism to avoid starving to death. Orange Juice, the peaceful orangutan, fights the hyena. Even the injured zebra battles to stay alive. The novel illustrates that living creatures will often act in unexpected ways in order to survive. They will, however, also behave in shameful and barbaric ways if forced to. The hyena's treachery and the blind Frenchman's attempt at cannibalism show the extent to which living creatures will go to save their own lives. At the end of the novel, when Pi raises the possibility that the fierce tiger, Richard Parker, is actually an aspect of his own personality, and that Pi himself is responsible for some of the horrific events he has narrated, the reader is forced to ponder the extremes of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" behaviors one is capable of in a life-or-death situation.

The Nature of Truth—*Life of Pi* is a story within a story within a story. The novel is framed by a note from the fictional author, who narrates how he first came to hear the tale of Piscine Molitor Patel. Within the framework of the unnamed author's narration is Pi's incredible first-person account of his seven months at sea following the sinking of the *Tsimtsum*. At the end of the novel, the transcript of the shipping company's interview with Pi tells another version of the story. The two Japanese interviewers have not believed Pi's account of his sojourn with Richard Parker, so he tells them "another story" in which there are no animals at all. Pi has spent those 227 days with three other human survivors—his mother, a Chinese sailor, and a French cook—who all eventually perish, leaving him alone.

Before telling the interviewers his second story, however, Pi tries to find out what it is about the first story that they find unbelievable. Each individual element is, in and of itself, credible, yet they do not accept the complete tale as the Truth. When the interviewers admit to believing the second story, Pi again tries to learn what it is about the second story that seems more truth-like than the first.

What Martel is forcing the reader to examine is the difference between *factual* truth and *metaphoric* truth. While one story might be *factually* true, both versions of Pi's story contain a kind of truth. Throughout the novel, Pi expresses contempt for rationalists who trust only "dry, yeastless factuality." Stories, Pi asserts, can amaze and inspire and are likely to be remembered far longer, recreating in the memory the original emotions they originally evoked.

Masking "yeastless factuality" in metaphor is also, perhaps, a means of survival. The factual events of Pi's sea voyage—if we are to believe the details of Pi's second story—are too horrible to consider. By recasting himself and others as animals, Pi does not have to admit directly the brutality of which he and other humans are capable. Thus, when the interviewers fail to believe his first story, and Pi does not seem able to understand why, he is still able to provide them with his "other" story, and be satisfied that he has told the truth—both times. It is interesting that, in the interviewers' final note to the unnamed fictitious author, they commend Pi's ability to survive as told in the first account. They do not comment on the horrors Pi must have survived in the second.

It is also interesting to note that the story of his life that Pi gives to the narrator—and the narrator gives to us—is the Richard Parker story. The narrator receives the other story from the Japanese interviewers.

The Nature of Faith—The novel begins with an old man in Pondicherry who tells the author, "I have a story that will make you believe in God." The young Pi becomes a strong devotee of three religions, at least two of which consider themselves to be mutually exclusive: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. When confronted with his unusual faith, he defends himself by asserting he only wants to "love God."

Several times during his ordeal at sea, especially during the lowest points, he survives only by practicing some vague approximation of his religions' rituals: mass without priest or communion host, and prayer without knowing where Mecca was.

To Pi, faith is a form of certainty. He dislikes agnostics because, like the two Japanese interviewers at the end of the novel, they refrain from making a definitive judgment. Agnostics claim that it is impossible to know either way, and they, therefore refuse to commit. Again, like the Japanese interviewers, agnostics are unable to appreciate the metaphoric truth of a parable or allegory. Atheists, on the other hand, Pi admires. While Pi disagrees with their faith, he admits that atheists at least have faith in *something*: the absence of God.

The Bildungsroman

A *Bildungsroman* is a type of novel that tells the story of the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development of the protagonist either from childhood to maturity or as the result of an extraordinary experience.

Bildungsromans usually contain most or all of the following elements:

- the protagonist grows from boy to man or girl to woman—if not literally, at least emotionally or psychologically.
- The protagonist must have some reason to go on this journey of growth and self-discovery. A loss or discontent must jar him or her at an early age away from the home or family setting. This element is often expressed as a theme of exile or escape.
- The growth process is long and grueling, and involves repeated clashes between the needs and desires of the protagonist and the unyielding demands of the society. This is not unlike the conflict between Freud's id and superego.
- Eventually, as the protagonist matures, he or she comes to recognize the appropriateness of the society's values, and he or she is assimilated into it. Sometimes, the character is in the process of making a smooth movement *away from* conformity. The major conflict is self vs. society or individuality vs. conformity.
- The novel ends with the protagonist evaluating himself or herself and his or her new place in society.

It is clear that *Life of Pi* exhibits many elements of the *bildungsroman*. Pi's journey of maturity does not begin with his family's original emigration from Pondicherry but with the sinking of the *Tsimtsum* and the beginning of his horrendous 227 days as a castaway at sea.

In order for Pi to survive—in either account—he must pit his personal desires and needs against both the unyielding demands of the society of nature and the ocean and the psychological and emotional controls of the human society he has left behind. The vegetarian Pi eats flesh. The pious Pi becomes a murderer, and the mild-mannered and loving Pi indulges in cannibalism.

By the time he is recuperating in Mexico and the Japanese interviewers talk to him, he is beginning to re-assimilate himself into the society of human values and laws. The result is the metaphorical tale of the tiger, Richard Parker. Pi's final evaluation of himself and his place in society occurs at the beginning of the novel when the adult Pi, with wife and family, assures the unnamed, fictitious author the story has a happy ending.

Practice Free Response Questions

Practice Free Response Question 1

Contemporary authors often utilize multiple voices or narrative points of view in order to provide their readers with a fuller, more complete view of the characters and their situations. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze Yann Martel's use of both Pi's and the narrator's voices in the telling of Pi's story.

Practice Free Response Question 2

A popular form of novels and films is the *bildungsroman*, the story of a character's emotional or psychological coming of age. Write a well-organized essay in which you examine *The Life of Pi* as a *bildungsroman*.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

Practice Free Response Question 3

A narrative technique often employed by novelists and playwrights is to present multiple versions, told by multiple sources, of the same event. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the meaning of the varying accounts of Pi's tale and what they contribute to the overall meaning of the novel.

Practice Free Response Question 4

Read the passage from Chapter(s) 96 through 99, beginning with the beginning of Chapter 96 and ending in Chapter 99 with Mr. Okamoto's saying about the tiger: "No trace of it has been found."

Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the sources of humor in the conversation between Pi and the Japanese interviewers, and examine what this humor contributes to the overall impact of the novel.

Practice Free Response Question 5

Read the Author's Note and write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the author's motive for telling the story of Pi Patel and the impact of this motive on the general credibility of the author's account.

Practice Free Response Question 6

Read Chapter 86 in its entirety. Then write a well-organized essay in which you evaluate Pi's declaration of love for Richard Parker as a climax in the development of Pi's character.

Practice Free Response Question 7

Read Chapter 57. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the developing relationship between the narrator and the tiger Richard Parker on both its literal and metaphoric levels.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 1-5

Read the Author's Note and Chapter 1 before selecting the best answers to the following questions.

1. The Author's Note opens the novel with
 - (A.) necessary exposition.
 - (B.) a sense of verisimilitude.
 - (C.) suspense.
 - (D.) humor.
 - (E.) an air of foreboding.
2. All of the following are suggested as potential themes for the novel EXCEPT
 - (A.) storytelling.
 - (B.) rebuilding after loss.
 - (C.) hunger and poverty.
 - (D.) truth and fiction.
 - (E.) spirituality.
3. The shift from italics to plain text between the Author's Note and Chapter 1 indicates a shift
 - (A.) in time from past to present.
 - (B.) in voice from the author to someone else.
 - (C.) in tone from mournful to reflective.
 - (D.) in pace from languid to frenzied.
 - (E.) in mood from somber to hopeful.
4. The speaker's account of himself in Chapter 1 can best be described as
 - (A.) desultory.
 - (B.) mournful.
 - (C.) blithe.
 - (D.) disinterested.
 - (E.) uncommunicative.
5. All of the following are suggested by Chapter 1 EXCEPT
 - (A.) Pi has suffered both physically and emotionally.
 - (B.) Pi has been deeply hurt by thoughtless and cruel people.
 - (C.) Pi is a zoologist.
 - (D.) Pi is deeply spiritual.
 - (E.) Pi is essentially an unhappy man.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 6 – 10

Read Chapter 17 before selecting the best answer to the following questions.

6. The primary recurring motif of this chapter is
 - (A.) the nature of gods and divine avatars.
 - (B.) the stories of Christianity and Hinduism.
 - (C.) the kindness of the priest.
 - (D.) love and reincarnation.
 - (E.) faith as torment and humiliation.
7. The majority of the similes in this chapter emphasize the
 - (A.) strangeness of the Christian faith.
 - (B.) refreshing taste of foreign food.
 - (C.) similarities between Hinduism and Christianity.
 - (D.) comfort of the family on vacation.
 - (E.) incarnations of various religions' deities.
8. What does Pi find is unique about Christianity?
 - (A.) The entire religion is founded upon a single story.
 - (B.) The religion's deity was once incarnated as a baby.
 - (C.) The god of the religion performs miracles.
 - (D.) The priest speaks kindly to Pi.
 - (E.) The religion's deity assumes human characteristics.
9. All of the following are comparisons Pi finds between the Christian and Hindu gods EXCEPT
 - (A.) both have incarnated themselves in human form.
 - (B.) both are miracle workers.
 - (C.) both endure adversity.
 - (D.) both are regal, kinglike, powerful figures.
 - (E.) both attract the spiritual imagination of young Pi.
10. Father Martin's insistence that the foundation of the Christian faith is love serves as this chapter's
 - (A.) epode.
 - (B.) lyric.
 - (C.) strophe.
 - (D.) antistrophe.
 - (E.) refrain.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 11- 15

Read Chapter 23 before selecting the best answer to the following questions.

11. The central conflict in this passage is
 - (A.) between youth and adulthood.
 - (B.) among three competing religions.
 - (C.) between politics and faith.
 - (D.) among home, self, and church.
 - (E.) among competing aspects of an individual's soul
12. All of the following are means by which the clergy attack one another's religion EXCEPT
 - (A.) nationalistic pride.
 - (B.) archaic rituals.
 - (C.) implausibility of mythologies.
 - (D.) conceptions of deity.
 - (E.) personal appeal.
13. Pi's response to the religious men's debate is powerful in its
 - (A.) profundity.
 - (B.) absurdity.
 - (C.) congeniality.
 - (D.) simplicity.
 - (E.) serendipity.
14. Which of the following is NOT a means by which Martel introduces humor to this scene?
 - (A.) the visit to the ice-cream *wallah*
 - (B.) the father's reaction to Pi's statement
 - (C.) the coincidence of the religious men's meeting one another
 - (D.) Pi's sincere response about loving God
 - (E.) the adult Pi's narrative rhythm and word choice
15. From the tone of this passage, one can infer that Martel's attitude toward organized religion is
 - (A.) slightly intolerant.
 - (B.) mildly mocking.
 - (C.) clearly neutral.
 - (D.) patiently indulgent.
 - (E.) arrogantly dismissive.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 16 – 20

Read Chapters 60 – 61 before selecting the best answers to the following questions:

16. Which of the following literary techniques does Yann Martel use in Chapter 60?
 - (A.) symbolism and irony
 - (B.) imagery and allusion
 - (C.) epiphany and foreshadowing
 - (D.) contradiction and anticipation
 - (E.) monologue and catharsis
17. Pi's reference to feeling "guilty as Cain" is ironic because
 - (A.) the allusion to Cain is an Old Testament reference, and Pi has embraced the New Testament Christianity.
 - (B.) Cain was also a fisherman.
 - (C.) as a Hindu, Pi feels like a "brother" to the fish he is killing.
 - (D.) the allusion to Cain is a Christian and Muslim reference and it is his Hindu belief in life that causes his guilty feeling.
 - (E.) Cain killed willfully and was motivated by envy while Pi is killing only out of need.
18. Pi's comparing Richard Parker's efficiency at catching the flying fish to his own clumsiness suggests
 - (A.) the wild animal's superior ability to survive in the natural world.
 - (B.) the ultimate triumph of human reason over animal instinct.
 - (C.) Richard Parker's superior hunting skill.
 - (D.) Pi's unwillingness to destroy another life.
 - (E.) the interconnectedness of all living things.
19. Pi's thanking the Hindu god Vishnu for providing the fish that he will kill suggests that
 - (A.) Pi's Hindu beliefs are stronger than his other beliefs.
 - (B.) Pi's values and faiths are changing in the face of his need for survival.
 - (C.) vegetarians do not consider fish to be meat.
 - (D.) the fish is a Hindu personification of evil.
 - (E.) Pi will allow Richard Parker to kill the fish himself.
20. Yann Martel creates a sense of symmetry in this passage by
 - (A.) beginning and ending the passage at night.
 - (B.) beginning and ending the passage with Pi sleeping.
 - (C.) referring to the stars and moon.
 - (D.) suggesting that Pi is gaining control over his circumstances.
 - (E.) beginning and ending on positive notes.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 21 – 25

Read the first half of Chapter 92, starting at the beginning of the chapter and ending with Pi's saying, "his pent-up hunting instinct was lashing out with a vengeance" before choosing the best answers to the following questions.

21. Pi's immersing himself in one of the freshwater pools is reminiscent of
 - (A.) Christian baptism.
 - (B.) learning to swim.
 - (C.) prayer time in a mosque.
 - (D.) falling overboard.
 - (E.) rescuing Richard Parker.
22. All of the following are surprising or unexpected features of the island EXCEPT the
 - (A.) island contains pools of fresh water.
 - (B.) meerkats have no fear of predators.
 - (C.) island appears to have no solid ground.
 - (D.) island completely lacks insect life.
 - (E.) tiger spends his days exploring the island.
23. Pi's confession that there will be many who will not believe the island episode suggests that
 - (A.) the story is not true.
 - (B.) he recognizes the allegorical nature of his story.
 - (C.) he doubts his own account.
 - (D.) the whole island is an illusion.
 - (E.) the nature of truth is relative.
24. What is significant about the fact that the tiger Richard Parker kills beyond his need?
 - (A.) The animal's brute nature is being exaggerated.
 - (B.) The calm of the island life is disrupted.
 - (C.) Pi finally faces the animal side of his own nature.
 - (D.) Richard Parker is more human than animal.
 - (E.) The meerkats have no instinctive fear of predators.
25. At the beginning of his narration of the island episode, Pi assumes that the island is
 - (A.) carnivorous.
 - (B.) illusory.
 - (C.) uninhabited.
 - (D.) vegetative.
 - (E.) prohibited.

Answers with Explanations

1. The Author's Note opens the novel with
 - (A.) necessary exposition.—The information regarding the circumstances of the author's finding the story and writing the book, while interesting, is hardly necessary to the story itself.
 - (B.) **a sense of verisimilitude.—One of the themes of the novel is the nature of truth and the role of truth and factuality in storytelling. This Author's Note gives the story a sense of being a "true story."**
 - (C.) suspense.—As the reader presumably knows nothing about the story yet, the Author's Note might evoke curiosity, but not really suspense.
 - (D.) humor.—The tone of the Author's Note is reflective, at times almost sorrowful, hardly humorous.
 - (E.) an air of foreboding.—Again, as the reader knows nothing about the story, there is no sense whether we are going to be told a "happy" story or a suspenseful and frightening one. If anything, Mr. Adirubasamy's assertion that this story will make the author believe in God would portend an uplifting story.
2. All of the following are suggested as potential themes for the novel EXCEPT
 - (A.) storytelling.—The author is telling a story. Mr. Adirubasamy promises the author a story. And then Pi tells his story. Clearly, this is going to be a book about storytelling.
 - (B.) rebuilding after loss.—Even before we know the full details of Pi's story, the fact that the adult Pi has experienced great loss and has rebuilt a life is clear. The author, too, in his Author's Note explains that he came across Pi's story as a result of his own professional losses and his attempt to rebuild.
 - (C.) **hunger and poverty.—When the author says the novel was written because he was hungry, he is speaking metaphorically. He says he has money to spend, and that is how he finances his trip to India. Neither the author, nor Mr. Adirubasamy, nor Pi live in poverty or seem to be experiencing literal hunger.**
 - (D.) truth and fiction.—The author presents his fictional Author's Note as if it were true. He combines potentially true sources with those that will turn out to be fictional in his acknowledgements.
 - (E.) spirituality.—From the moment Mr. Adirubasamy tells the author that this story will make him believe in God, we suspect that there will be a strongly spiritual story.

3. The shift from italics to plain text between the Author's Note and Chapter 1 indicates a shift
- (A.) in time from past to present.—The author's note brought us chronologically up to the point of the author's first contact with Pi, so the transition from the end of the Author's note to the beginning of Chapter 1 is not a significant time jump.
 - (B.) **in voice from the author to someone else.—Both are in the first person, and both are clearly different voices. The "I" of the Author's Note is the (fictional) author, and the "I" of Chapter 1 is Mr. Patel.**
 - (C.) in tone from mournful to reflective.—Both are reflective, bordering on the mournful.
 - (D.) in pace from languid to frenzied.—While neither is fast-paced, neither could be called exactly languid either. The pace is slow and reflective in both.
 - (E.) in mood from somber to hopeful.—Both are somber, and there is not yet a sense of hope.
4. The speaker's account of himself in Chapter 1 can best be described as
- (A.) **desultory.—There is no apparent scheme or plan to the topics Mr. Patel covers. He begins with a brief mention of his "suffering," touches in his study of the sloth, mentions his religious studies thesis, his academic career, his love of Canada, Richard Parker, etc. We end the chapter with no clear sense of where Patel's story is going to take us.**
 - (B.) mournful.—Parts of the account are clearly reflective, but "mournful" is probably too strong a word, especially with "desultory" as a possible choice.
 - (C.) blithe.—Clearly the tone is reflective, bordering on the sad—not blithe or happy at all.
 - (D.) disinterested.—This response might infer a *motive* on Patel's part for the rambling account he gives of himself, but there really is no reason to conclude that Patel is disinterested in his story or in telling it to the author.
 - (E.) uncommunicative.—Clearly, if Patel were being uncommunicative, there *would not* be a Chapter 1.
5. All of the following are suggested by Chapter 1 EXCEPT
- (A.) Pi has suffered both physically and emotionally.—He begins the Chapter by saying his "suffering has left [him] sad and gloomy." His account also includes both an academic slight (being passed over at the University for the Governor's Academic Medal) and a cultural slight (the waiter's commenting on Patel's eating Indian food with his fingers). Both slights still trouble the adult Patel. He also makes a brief mention of his time recuperating in a Mexican hospital.
 - (B.) Pi has been deeply hurt by thoughtless and cruel people.—Again, the slight at the University and in the Indian restaurant support this.
 - (C.) **Pi is a zoologist.—We know that Pi studied zoology *and religious studies*, so we do not yet know what he does for a living.**
 - (D.) Pi is deeply spiritual.—Toward the middle of the chapter, he speaks at fairly great length of his mocking death and loving life. He criticizes his fellow religious studies majors for lacking spirituality, and he makes at least one reference to the Hindu goddess of wealth.
 - (E.) Pi is essentially an unhappy man.—He begins the chapter by admitting that he is "sad and gloomy" and returns several times to the theme of having suffered and being sad.

6. The primary recurring motif of this chapter is
- (A.) the nature of gods and divine avatars.—In his telling of how he came to embrace Christianity, Pi does compare the Christian concept of God with Hindu deities, and he does mention Jesus as the Christian god's avatar, but this does not become a recurring motif.
 - (B.) **the stories of Christianity and Hinduism.**—Stories and storytelling have already been identified as motifs in the novel, and now one of the elements of Pi's spiritual search is a comparison of the two religions' stories.
 - (C.) the kindness of the priest.—Again, this is a factor in this chapter and in Pi's being attracted to Christianity, but also does not recur as a motif.
 - (D.) love and reincarnation.—Love certainly is the Priest's mantra, his answer to every one of Pi's objections, but it does not emerge as a significant motif.
 - (E.) faith as torment and humiliation.—The only mention of torment and humiliation is in relation to the story of Jesus, and Pi's amazement that the Christians would envision a god who would suffer such.
7. The majority of the similes in this chapter emphasize the
- (A.) strangeness of the Christian faith.—Certainly this is an issue in the passage, but it is not discussed in similes.
 - (B.) refreshing taste of foreign food.—The freshness of the mint is, in itself, part of a simile. Literal food is not an issue in this passage.
 - (C.) similarities between Hinduism and Christianity.—Again, most of the chapter deals with Pi's comparing the two religions, but he does not use similes in his comparison.
 - (D.) **comfort of the family on vacation.**—Throughout the chapter, Pi notes that the coolness of the air at the location of the family vacation was "as pleasing as having a mint in your mouth"; his parents appeared as comfortable "as two cats sunning themselves at a window"; even Pi's description of the torn and broken figure on the crucifix makes a comparison to "petals of a flower."
 - (E.) incarnations of various religions' deities. —Again, there is considerable mention of various gods' various incarnations, but Pi does not use similes in his comparison.

8. What does Pi find is unique about Christianity?
- (A.) The entire religion is founded upon a single story.—This is what amazes Pi from the very beginning. When he asks for a better story—expecting that, since “religions abound with stories,” Christianity would have “more than one story in its bag.” He is amazed when Father Martin insists he has told Pi Christianity’s only story.
 - (B.) The religion’s deity was once incarnated as a baby.—Pi mentions a story about the “baby Krishna.”
 - (C.) The god of the religion performs miracles.—When discussing the miracles of the Christian deity, Pi complains, “Any Hindu God can do a hundred times better.” Thus, Jesus’ miracles are not unique.
 - (D.) The priest speaks kindly to Pi.—While Pi is surprised to be treated kindly and not expelled from the church, his surprise is founded upon his former presumption about the Catholic church, not about *all* churches and *all* priests.
 - (E.) The religion’s deity assumes human characteristics.—Much of the chapter contains Pi’s *comparison* of the Christian God’s human characteristics *and the various human characteristics of various Hindu gods*.
9. All of the following are comparisons Pi finds between the Christian and Hindu gods **except**
- (A.) both have incarnated themselves in human form.—Pi tells us of Jesus and the avatars of Vamana the dwarf and Rama, “the most human of avatars.”
 - (B.) both are miracle workers.—Pi notes the “medical nature” of Jesus’ miracles and then insists that “Any Hindu God can do a hundred times better.”
 - (C.) both endure adversity.—Pi describes Ramayana as “the account of one long, bad day for Rama.” He mentions that all gods experience “Adversity...Reversals of fortune...Treachery...” It is the *extremity* of Jesus’ adversity that Pi objects to.
 - (D.) both are regal, kinglike, powerful figures.—One of the issues that trouble Pi about Jesus is that he does *not* carry himself regally, like a king, but allows himself to be *humiliated and killed*.
 - (E.) both attract the spiritual imagination of young Pi.—Pi ends the chapter by thanking Lord Krishna for leading him to Jesus. Clearly, Pi now has two religions that he loves.
10. Father Martin’s insistence that the foundation of the Christian faith is love serves as this chapter’s
- (A.) epode.—In poetry, especially in the choral verses of classical tragedy, the epode was the line that followed the strophe and the antistrophe, and completed the back-and-forth dancing movement of the chorus.
 - (B.) lyric.—Technically, this is any line of poem primarily intended to be sung.
 - (C.) strophe.—In classical tragedy, this is the part of the choral verse that the chorus chants as it moves *from left to right* across the stage.
 - (D.) antistrophe. —In classical tragedy, this is the part of the choral verse that the chorus chants as it moves *from right to left* across the stage.
 - (E.) refrain.—This is a line or word that is repeated throughout the text for emphasis and to maintain a sense of rhythm.

11. The central conflict in this passage is
- (A.) between youth and adulthood.—Pi’s reaction to his “dilemma” and his parents’ reactions are certainly different—and amusing—but do not constitute a conflict in this episode.
 - (B.) among three competing religions.—This seems like a tempting response except that the representatives of the various religions devote more effort to discrediting their competitors than establishing the validity of their own religion. Thus, if it is a competition of religions, it is skewed at best.
 - (C.) **between politics and faith.**—The notion that one can practice *only one* religion, and the notion of which religions are *foreign* and which are legitimate, Pi’s reference to Gandhi, and the father’s insistence that Pi has a *right* to freedom of practice all suggest this as the best response. Pi even begins the chapter by mentioning the sense of community brought to those of a common faith, not the spiritual qualities of belonging to any given faith.
 - (D.) among home, self, and church.—There is not much to support this idea.
 - (E.) among competing aspects of an individual’s soul.—Again, the holy men’s arguments are more *against* one another’s religions than *for* any idea or any notion of religion’s benefits to the human.
12. All of the following are means by which the clergy attack one another’s religion EXCEPT
- (A.) nationalistic pride.—Islam and Christianity are derided as “foreign” religions by the pandit.
 - (B.) **archaic rituals.**—None of the clerics refers either to his own religion’s or to the other religions’ rituals.
 - (C.) implausibility of mythologies.—The priest dismisses Hinduism as “myths from a cartoon strip.”
 - (D.) conceptions of deity.—The imam and priest each attack the other’s God, whether human-personified or revealed in nature. The imam discredits both Hinduism and Christianity as idolatry, pagan religions with multiple gods.
 - (E.) personal appeal.—All three look at Pi and attempt to sway him toward their own religions.
13. Pi’s response to the religious men’s debate is powerful in its
- (A.) profundity.—The desire to love God is a simple religious instinct.
 - (B.) absurdity.—In the eyes of the faithful of all religions, *not* to love God would be the absurd.
 - (C.) congeniality.—We cannot say that Pi was *uncongenial*, but this is not really an issue in the episode.
 - (D.) **simplicity.**—From the child Pi’s perspective, this is at the root of *all* religions.
 - (E.) serendipity.—It is a sort of *negative* serendipity that places the three clerics and Pi’s family in the same place at the same time.

14. Which of the following is NOT a means by which Martel introduces humor to this scene?
- (A.) the visit to the ice-cream *wallah*—The matter-of-fact way in which the father offers the family ice-cream after the heated and surprising exchange with the holy men adds humor to the scene.
 - (B.) the father's reaction to Pi's statement—Pi says he found the response to be "funny" (i.e., odd), but the timid, unexpected response is also mildly humorous.
 - (C.) the coincidence of the religious men's meeting one another—Coincidence is one of the key elements of humor, and, of course, the results of the coincidental meeting are humorous.
 - (D.) **Pi's sincere response about loving God—This simple and sincere statement, coming from the youngest character in the episode and the center of a heated debate, with broader implications for world peace, is probably the *least* humorous event or bit of dialogue in the entire scene.**
 - (E.) the adult Pi's narrative rhythm and word choice—The tone created by the use of the dash ("—and they were not amused"; "—rich, modern and secular as ice cream"), the heavy use of simple sentences, especially the juxtaposition of contrasting sentences ("That was my introduction to interfaith dialogue. Father bought three ice cream sandwiches.") contribute humor to this scene.
15. From the tone of this passage, one can infer that Martel's attitude toward organized religion is
- (A.) slightly intolerant.—Martel, through Pi, has found something beautiful and admirable in all three of the religions Pi embraces. Pi is a very likeable character, and he embraces religion, thus suggesting Martel's essential approval of religion as well.
 - (B.) **mildly mocking.—Certainly in the clerics' competition for Pi and their judgments of each other's faith, Martel is mocking the institutions as represented by their "holy men."**
 - (C.) clearly neutral.—The very fact that Martel makes religion an issue in Pi's life and an element in this novel eliminates this as a choice.
 - (D.) patiently indulgent.—The passage is mildly humorous in tone, so this choice does not really satisfy.
 - (E.) arrogantly dismissive.—There is nothing in the passage to suggest Martel's dismissal of religion, only his mild amusement at some of religion's quirks.

16. Which of the following literary techniques does Yann Martel use in Chapter 60?
- (A.) symbolism and irony—Chapter 60 is a fairly straightforward and unironic account of Pi's epiphany.
 - (B.) **imagery and allusion—The passage includes vivid imagery of the star-filled night sky and the allusion to Markandeya's epiphanic experience.**
 - (C.) epiphany and foreshadowing—There is clearly an epiphany in Chapter 60, but no clear foreshadowing.
 - (D.) contradiction and anticipation—Neither is present in this passage.
 - (E.) monologue and catharsis—Pi's epiphany is not cathartic because he admits that as soon as the sun rises, he will have the same fears and thoughts he has always had. Thus, concern for his safety and anxiety over his circumstances are not "purged" and released by his epiphany.
17. Pi's reference to feeling "guilty as Cain" is ironic because
- (A.) the allusion to Cain is an Old Testament reference, and Pi has embraced the New Testament Christianity.—Old Testament allusions are also valid in Christianity.
 - (B.) Cain was also a fisherman.—The Cain alluded to here was a farmer.
 - (C.) as a Hindu, Pi feels like a "brother" to the fish he is killing.—This would make the allusion appropriate, not ironic.
 - (D.) the allusion to Cain is a Christian and Muslim reference and it is his Hindu belief in life that causes his guilty feeling.—This is irrelevant as Pi represents the spirituality of all three religions blended together.
 - (E.) **Cain killed willfully and was motivated by envy while Pi is killing only out of need.—At this point, Pi is not yet considering motive or need, only the act in itself and the result—that a life will be destroyed.**
18. Pi's comparing Richard Parker's efficiency at catching the flying fish to his own clumsiness suggests
- (A.) **the wild animal's superior ability to survive in the natural world.—This is one of the themes being developed in the novel.**
 - (B.) the ultimate triumph of human reason over animal instinct.—This is nearly the opposite of what is being illustrated.
 - (C.) Richard Parker's superior hunting skill.—Richard Parker is not hunting; the prey is coming to him.
 - (D.) Pi's unwillingness to destroy another life.—This concern occurs after the flying fish pass by.
 - (E.) the interconnectedness of all living things.—There is nothing to suggest this choice.

19. Pi's thanking the Hindu god Vishnu for providing the fish that he will kill suggests that
- (A.) Pi's Hindu beliefs are stronger than his other beliefs.—If this were true, Pi would not be able to kill the fish for bait.
 - (B.) Pi's values and faiths are changing in the face of his need for survival.—Being Christian, Muslim, and Hindu, Pi is learning to adapt the precepts of each faith to balance one another and to allow him to survive his ordeal at sea.**
 - (C.) vegetarians do not consider fish to be meat.—There is nothing to suggest this.
 - (D.) the fish is a Hindu personification of evil.—There is nothing to suggest this.
 - (E.) Pi will allow Richard Parker to kill the fish himself.—We see Pi kill the fish, so this is demonstrably untrue.
20. Yann Martel creates a sense of symmetry in this passage by
- (A.) beginning and ending the passage at night.—The passage covers a single day of Pi's adventure, and Martel punctuates this single day by showing Pi during two nights.**
 - (B.) beginning and ending the passage with Pi sleeping.—In the beginning of the chapter, Pi is awake. That is how he is able to see the stars and experience his epiphany.
 - (C.) referring to the stars and moon.—The passage begins with vivid imagery of the stars and moon, yet at the end of the passage, they are invisible. This is weak symmetry at best.
 - (D.) suggesting that Pi is gaining control over his circumstances.—The passage ends on this note, but does not begin so.
 - (E.) beginning and ending on positive notes.—The beginning is more reflective than positive.
21. Pi's immersing himself in one of the freshwater pools is reminiscent of
- (A.) Christian baptism.—Pi describes his immersion as refreshing and cleansing. He says that he felt as though even his *soul* had been corroded by salt. Clearly the bath has spiritual, as well as physical, implications.**
 - (B.) learning to swim.—This is a tempting choice, but there is nothing compelling in the two experiences to warrant this comparison.
 - (C.) prayer time in a mosque.—It is the movement of the meerkats that remind Pi of prayer time in a mosque.
 - (D.) falling overboard.—The times Pi falls overboard, he does so by accident or out of fear and falls into salt water. These pools provide cleansing and refreshment, and he dives in voluntarily.
 - (E.) rescuing Richard Parker.—While rescuing Richard Parker, Pi was in the boat and the tiger came out of the water.

22. All of the following are surprising or unexpected features of the island EXCEPT the
- (A.) island contains pools of fresh water.—Pi wonders where the fresh water has come from.
 - (B.) meerkats have no fear of predators.—Pi wonders at this when the meerkats first encounter Richard Parker. He also worries that perhaps they don't fear him because he should fear them.
 - (C.) island appears to have no solid ground.—This is one of the first attributes of the island to surprise Pi.
 - (D.) island completely lacks insect life.—When Pi realizes this, it is a source of considerable puzzlement to him.
 - (E.) **tiger spends his days exploring the island.—Having finally arrived on “land,” where there is plenty of food and fresh water, it makes sense that Richard Parker would prefer to be on “dry land” as opposed to confined to the boat.**
23. Pi's confession that there will be many who will not believe the island episode suggests that
- (A.) the story is not true.—Pi says the story is true and happened to him. Thus, he cannot be preparing us for a story that is not true.
 - (B.) **he recognizes the allegorical nature of his story.—This is the most likely choice. The nature of truth is one of the concerns in this novel, and Pi is possibly alluding to the allegorical truth of the story he is telling.**
 - (C.) he doubts his own account. —Pi says the story is true and happened to him.
 - (D.) the whole island is an illusion.—In the beginning of the episode, Pi is prepared for this possibility but soon finds that he is able to stand firmly on “dry land.”
 - (E.) the nature of truth is relative.—This is tempting but is ultimately too unclear and vague, especially compared with choice (B), to be satisfying.
24. What is significant about the fact that the tiger Richard Parker kills beyond his need?
- (A.) **The animal's brute nature is being exaggerated.—Typically, animals do not kill more than they need. The suggestion here is that the tiger is not killing for food, but merely for the sake of killing.**
 - (B.) The calm of the island life is disrupted.—There is no struggle in Richard Parker's killing. The meerkats do not comprehend, and there is no disruption of the peace.
 - (C.) Pi finally faces the animal side of his own nature.—At this point, we do not yet know the allegorical significance of the story.
 - (D.) Richard Parker is more human than animal.—One might argue that the reverse is closer to the truth—Pi is becoming more animal than human.
 - (E.) The meerkats have no instinctive fear of predators.—This explains their not struggling against Richard Parker, not Richard Parker's excessive killing.
25. At the beginning of his narration of the island episode, Pi assumes that the island is
- (A.) carnivorous.—He discovers this—to his surprise and dismay—near the end of the chapter.
 - (B.) **illusory.—That is why he so carefully consults the survival manual about how to approach an island that might really be a mirage.**
 - (C.) uninhabited.—Pi makes no assumptions about this either way.
 - (D.) vegetative.—Pi *discovers* this after he leaves the boat. It is not an early assumption.
 - (E.) prohibited.—There is nothing to suggest this.

Life of Pi

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 its essence"?

The author is suggesting that, while the story he is about to tell is true, or reflects reality, it is fiction and will not be a literal account of "what really happened," but a "twisting" of the facts to bring out their "essence."

2. Why did the author go to India?

He had written a book that was published in Canada, but it was not very well received. Feeling defeated and restless, he decided to go to India to work on his next novel.

3. Why does the author mail his manuscript for the book about Portugal to a made-up address in Siberia?

He thinks that his novel is worthless, so as a mark of his defeat, he mails his manuscript to a place that does not exist.

4. Who first tells the author about Mr. Patel's story? How many storytellers does this make in the book so far?

Mr. Adirubasamy, a man he meets in a coffee house, tells the author the story. We now have a tale based on a story heard from a stranger in a coffee shop, retold by an author we cannot be sure of.

5. What is most significant about the story that the author hears?

Mr. Adrubasamy says that the story the author is about to hear, and which we are about to read, "will make you believe in God."

PART ONE: Toronto and Pondicherry

CHAPTER 1

1. What is suggested by the fact that the Author's note was set in italics, and Chapter 1 is set in normal text?

The differences in text suggest that the first-person speakers in each section are different people.

2. Who do we assume is the speaker of Chapter 1? What suggests this?

The speaker is Mr. Patel. Structurally, the author's note ended with the introduction to Mr. Patel's story, which the author says he will allow Mr. Patel to tell in his own voice. Then Chapter 1 begins with that story.

3. Why did the person speaking in Chapter 1 choose to study the sloth?

Mr. Patel begins his story by saying that his suffering left him sad and gloomy. He chose to study the sloth because its "demeanor—calm, quiet and introspective—did something to soothe [his] shattered self."

4. What we can infer about Mr. Patel from his tone?

He seems to be a gentle, intensely emotional person. He expresses love for a boy who beat him in a scholarship competition, and he tells us that he once fainted when a faucet was turned on because the experience was so shocking. He is also very interested in and knowledgeable about animals.

5. What is significant about the cities Mr. Patel says he would like to visit?

Mecca is the holiest city of Islam, one of Pi's three religions; Varanasi is a holy city in the Hindu faith, another of Pi's three religions; Jerusalem is holy to Muslims and Christians, Christianity being the third of Pi's three religions. Paris is a reputedly beautiful and romantic city. Oxford is the site of the great English university and a world-famous seat of academics.

6. What were Mr. Patel's two majors in college? What connection does he make between the two? How do they foreshadow what is likely to come later in the novel?

Patel majored in both zoology and religious studies. He compares religious-studies majors—people who analyze religion, but will not commit to believing in God—to sloths; they are confused and hesitant. Sloths, on the other hand, remind him of God. Mr. Patel sees design, order, and beauty in the natural world. The combination of the two majors suggests that animals, God, and faith will play roles in the story Mr. Patel has to tell.

7. What can we infer about the narrator so far?

We can infer that he has suffered great hardship and loss ("My suffering left me sad and gloomy"). He came from India ("I have nothing to go home to in Pondicherry"). We can also guess that the story he has to tell involved illness or injury ("The doctors and nurses at the hospital in Mexico were incredibly kind to me").

CHAPTER 2

1. What do the language and format of this chapter establish for the reader?

This chapter is again in italics and written in the third person point of view. This establishes that Yann Martel is using plain text and first-person narration for Mr. Patel to tell his story, and italics in the third person for the fictional author's insertions.

2. What is significant about the details the fictional author chooses to reveal about Mr. Patel?

Essentially, the author confirms Mr. Patel's gentle nature and possibly nervous demeanor.

CHAPTER 3

1. What might the origin of Patel's name foreshadow?

Patel's story is most likely going to involve water.

2. What significant trait did the narrator and Mamaji share?

They both loved swimming.

3. Who is the man Patel calls Mamaji, who teaches Patel how to swim? How have we already met him?

Mamaji is Francis Adirubasamy, the man who told the fictional author, "I have a story that will make you believe in God."

4. What does the name "Mamaji" mean?

In Tamil, an Indian dialect, "Mama" means "uncle." "Ji" is a suffix that "indicates respect and affection." Although not related to Mr. Patel, Mamaji was like a beloved uncle to him.

5. What distinction does Mr. Patel make between the ocean and the swimming pool? What is the significance of this distinction?

The ocean is chaotic and uncontrollable, while the swimming pool has a “proper rectangularity and [a] formal flatness.” The significance is that the chaotic and uncontrollable nature of the ocean is going to figure strongly into this story.

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

The narrator is Piscine Molitor Patel. He was named after Mamaji’s favorite pool in Paris, France, the Piscine Molitor.

7. What is significant about the narrator’s name?

Piscine was named after a famous swimming pool, and he loves to swim.

8. What did Piscine’s father do for a living?

Piscine’s father was a zookeeper.

CHAPTER 4

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

His father ran a hotel; according to Piscine, running a zoo is not very different, although the “guests” are much more demanding.

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

Pi loves living in a zoo. He calls it “Paradise on earth,” indicating that this is the idyllic, Edenic period of Pi’s life, before his story of maturation.

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

Piscine is implying that “freedom” is not a high priority for animals, and that those humans who criticize zoos for depriving animals of this “freedom” do not understand the truth of the situation.

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

Piscine is essentially comparing a house to a zoo. Just as humans—who once roamed “free” in jungles and on plains—have adapted satisfactorily to sheltered lives, so too do animals—especially those born in captivity—adapt to habitations in which all of their needs are met.

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

Piscine clearly believes that animals are better off in a zoo. In a zoo, animals have regular medical care, plenty of food, and a well-needed schedule. In the wild, they lead lives of “compulsion and necessity.”

6. 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?

Pi says that no person with “all the usual ties—to family, to friends, to society” would willingly choose to be cut loose from these things. This is significant because this is exactly what will happen to Pi.

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

Just as people who do not understand believe zoos imprison animals and deprive them of happiness, many people who do not understand believe religion deprives people of their freedom.

CHAPTER 5

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

Pi is the ratio of a circle’s radius to area and diameter to circumference. Circles will play an important role in this novel, with Pi eventually realizing he is the center of his own circle.

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

Another important theme in this book is the question of order in the universe; Pi says many times that stories are our way of making sense of a baffling existence.

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

He shows a will to survive and the ability to take control of a situation. These qualities will help him later in the book.

CHAPTER 6

1. What does the author's description of Patel's kitchen suggest?

The author notes that Patel's kitchen is jammed with far more food than he could eat, as if he is hoarding food against some possible disaster.

CHAPTER 7

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

Pi says, "[Mr. Kumar's] construction was geometric: he looked like two triangles, a small one and a larger one, balanced on two parallel lines." Mr. Kumar represents the world of abstract reasoning. Like Pi, whose name also represents an important geometric ratio, Mr. Kumar is associated with these theoretical concepts.

2. Why does Mr. Kumar love the zoo?

To Mr. Kumar, an avowed atheist, every animal in the zoo is a "triumph of logic and mechanics" and a symbol of the nature of science.

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

The zoo reassures Mr. Kumar that the universe is orderly. He seems to think that it is people, with their emotions and irrationality, who cause problems.

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

As a rationalist, Mr. Kumar looks for the cause to every effect. His story about having polio as a child illustrates his rational approach. What God would have let a boy suffer from such a disease? Meanwhile, it was not God who saved him, but medical science.

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

Pi is afraid that Mr. Kumar's rational words will take a hold of him the way the polio virus took hold of the young Kumar. Pi does not want Kumar's rationality to destroy his faith. He says, "What a terrible disease that must be if it could kill God in a man."

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

Atheists also follow their reason; once they reach the bounds of reason, they "leap" by proclaiming that there is no God. Believers also go to the edge of reason, then find God beyond this edge.

7. What problem does Pi have with agnostics?

Agnostics are unable to commit to any position. They live in a state of perpetual doubt.

CHAPTER 8

1. 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”?

Man is the one who causes problems in zoos by tormenting the animals. Human beings will feed dangerous items to animals just to see what the animals will do.

Pi’s father insists, however, that the anthropomorphized animal is the most dangerous of all. People must not make the mistake of believing that animals are like humans, with human understanding and emotions.

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

A central theme of the book is the inability of humans to understand the natural world or God except through the lens of human experience and reason. The truth is, however, that we can really understand neither by comparing them to ourselves.

3. 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 this episode foreshadow?

The brutal death of the goat graphically illustrates the viciousness of natural world. Set beside the discussion of anthropomorphism, it illustrates that wild animals are not humans with the same emotions and rational thought processes. Martel might be foreshadowing an incident in which human nature and brute animal nature meet one another—possibly dealing with a tiger.

CHAPTER 9

1. What is a “flight distance”?

A “flight distance” is “the minimum distance at which an animal wants to keep a perceived enemy.” Put more simply, “flight distance” refers to how close an animal will allow an enemy to get to it before it flees.

2. Why is an understanding of animals' flight distance important to a zookeeper?

A caged animal that cannot flee when its enemy is too close experiences extreme stress. It is in the animal's best interest—physically and emotionally—for the zookeeper to minimize the animal's flight distance so it can tolerate being observed by humans at close range.

CHAPTER 10

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

He says that animals whose enclosures are not just right may try to escape, as may wild animals suddenly brought into captivity. But animals may also try to escape for no good reason, as a result of the “measure of madness” built into all living things.

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

The zoo was an important part of Pi's growing up. The entire book is a study of the behaviors of humans and animals in unnatural and unexpected circumstances.

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

the unknown

CHAPTER 11

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

Although hunting dogs were set loose to chase her and traps were set to catch her, the escaped leopard lived for two months in the area around the city. Pi says that the fact that this leopard lived so long without being seen and did not attack anyone while she was out proves that escaped animals are not dangerous and are actually just trying to fit into the new environments in which they find themselves.

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

Pi has been saying that even cities house more forms of wildlife than people can imagine. Here he seems to be saying that some unusual creature was able to hide in the Mexican jungle without being found.

CHAPTER 12

1. What does the narrator's saying that Pi Patel "bobs" on the "ocean of memory" foreshadow?

The narrator is foreshadowing the telling of Pi's story, when, as a teenager, Pi floated in a life boat on the Pacific Ocean for two hundred twenty-seven days.

2. Who is Richard Parker who "preys on [Pi Patel's] mind"?

At this point, we cannot know with any certainty, but we should recognize the allusion to the Richard Parker in the Poe story—a young boy who was shipwrecked and killed by the other people on his life boat, who survived by eating him. We can only assume that Patel is either haunted by the Poe character, or that Richard Parker was one of the persons whom Pi encountered during his adventure at sea—possibly someone on the ship or on his life boat. The fact that he still "preys on" Pi's mind suggests that Parker came to some horrible end that somehow involved Pi.

CHAPTER 13

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

Clearly the story is going to have a great deal to do with a wild animal in unfamiliar territory and a human's need to establish control over it.

2. Why is social hierarchy important to animals? What does this have to do with the story Mr. Patel is going to tell the narrator?

Social hierarchy is important because much of animal survival depends on knowing precisely where it fits in that hierarchy. The story Patel is going to tell the narrator most likely has to do with animal territorialism and dominance.

CHAPTER 14

1. Why is the animal with the "lowest social standing" also the easiest to train?

The animal with the lowest social standing has the most to gain from associating with the alpha member of the group.

CHAPTER 15

1. What can be inferred from the religious artifacts that the author sees in Patel's house about the person who lives in that house?

The narrator describes the house as a temple. There are items in this house from three different religions; all three appear to be equally revered. There are depictions of the Hindu god Ganesha, the Buddhist deity Krishna, and Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christianity. The person whose house this is appears to be a devotee of three of the major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

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

At least some of the artifacts make the narrator smile. He seems to have a positive view of these objects and of the breadth of Pi's faith.

CHAPTER 16

1. Explain Pi's concept of the Brahman nirguna.

Brahman nirguna is the fundamental spiritual essence, which is beyond human understanding.

2. What is Brahman saguna?

Brahman saguna is Brahman, or God, made manifest in physical things. Unlike Brahman nirguna, Brahman saguna can be understood by human beings.

3. What does Pi say made him a Hindu?

He says that the rich sensory details of Hinduism made him love the religion from the start. But he is also a Hindu in his religious philosophy.

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

Being divine, Krishna was able to love all of the milkmaids at once, but, as soon as the girls became possessive, each wanting Krishna for her own, he would vanish. The point is that no one faith can "possess" God, claim Him for its own. If we start to believe that God belongs only to us, we lose our connection with Him.

CHAPTER 17

1. What confuses Pi about Christianity?

Pi can understand and appreciate the Christians' concept of God suffering challenges, but he cannot comprehend a deity's being willing to subject Himself to abject humiliation. To Pi, that is amazingly un-godlike.

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

love

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

Pi is impressed by Christianity's humanity. He is "compelled" by the idea that Christ is God incarnate. He likes the idea that God is accessible to all people because His son was human. Hinduism, then, provides Pi with a spiritual sense of the interconnectedness of all living things, and Christianity offers him a means to approach God.

CHAPTER 18

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

Pi is, at first, frightened by both Christianity and Islam. To him, Christianity has a "reputation for...violence." He is so wary of it, in fact, that he is afraid to go into the church. If Christianity has this reputation, "Islam [has] a reputation that is worse." Pi learns about each religion by one-on-one interaction with members of that religion. His aunt and mother take him to the Hindu temple when he is small; he strikes up a friendship with the priest who teaches him about Christianity; and he likewise meets a Muslim baker who teaches him about Islam.

2. What first impresses Pi about Islam?

Pi's first impression of Islam is its immediacy. When the baker hears the call to prayer, he immediately rolls out his prayer matt and begins praying. To Pi, Muslim prayer is "quick, necessary, [and] physical..."

CHAPTER 19

1. Why does Piscine like praying in the mosque?

Pi finds the Islamic method of prayer, which involves kneeling and bringing his head down to the ground, to be physically satisfying.

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

Hinduism gives Pi his spiritual sense and his respect for all life. Christianity gives him a sense of humility and a closeness to God. Islam gives Pi a physical and satisfying means of expressing and practicing his faiths.

CHAPTER 20

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

The Muslim baker has the same name, Mr. Kumar, as Pi's favorite teacher—the biology teacher and atheist who loved the zoo. Martel is most likely suggesting parallels between atheism and faith, and faith and reason. The two vastly different Mr. Kumars also parallel Pi's ultimate decision to major in zoology and theology.

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

One occurs when he is riding his bicycle back from the Muslim Mr. Kumar's house. Pi looks around at the trees, sea, and sky and suddenly sees how everything is connected. The second experience takes place much later, in Canada. Pi sees snow falling in the sunlight, and within the snow is the Virgin Mary. Both of these experiences take place in natural settings. The sense of all things' interconnectedness is a chief belief of Hinduism while a vision of the Virgin Mary is undeniably Christian. These two events underscore the depth of Pi's belief in multiple religions.

CHAPTER 21

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

Patel's life is so full, so meaningful, and Patel himself is so full of life that the author is now—more than ever—convinced of the hollowness of his own life.

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

The author, having just finished another visit with Patel, is most likely thinking about what Pi has said to him. Here we have the suggestion that the “better” story is not necessarily the “factual” one, that there might be something lacking in the relating of mere facts. Perhaps the story Patel is telling the narrator is not precisely factual.

CHAPTERS 22 - 23

1. 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?

Pi, of course, would believe that an atheist would come to believe in God at the time of death.

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

Pi is talking about the priest, the imam, and the pandit.

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

Pi’s father has a completely pragmatic attitude toward religion. While he is not a man of faith himself, he has two small Hindu shrines at his zoo for public relations.

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

Rather than acting like men of God, faith, and love—practicing the principles each has been teaching Pi—they act like competitors with Pi as the prize.

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

The priest asserts that Christianity is an all-exclusive religion— “There’s salvation only in Jesus.” Further, he discounts Hindus as “idolaters,” and dismisses Muhammad as an “illiterate merchant.”

The pandit insists that both Islam and Christianity are foreign, colonialist faiths imposed upon the native Hindus.

The Imam asserts that Hinduism, with its caste system, is a system of slavery. He further insists that both Hindus and Christians are idolaters.

The point of this scene is clearly that, while Pi has seen beauty and truth in all three faiths—and obviously does not see them as mutually exclusive—the three religious men devote much more energy to denigrating the other religions than pointing out the beauties of their own.

6. What is the power of Pi's response to the competing religious men?

The power of Pi's response lies in its simplicity. Pi simply wants to "love God."

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

The chapter ends on a mildly humorous note. The three religious men walk away, essentially dissatisfied that none of them has "won." Pi's father has uttered a statement that Pi finds ridiculously out of character for him, the mother smiles warmly at her son—amused, but not upset—by her son's ecumenicalism, and life returns quickly to a pleasant routine of ice-cream sandwiches and Sunday afternoon walks.

CHAPTERS 24 - 25

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

The adult Pi already knows the end of the story he is telling. Memory of his brother and their relationship is painful.

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

First, Pi mentions the irony of mere humans believing they need to defend and protect the Almighty. Then, he reflects on the irony that, now that it is known he is a practitioner of more than one religion, he is made to feel unwelcome at all of them.

CHAPTER 26

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

The primary conflict is among faith, apathy, and reason. Pi represents faith, and he sees the similarities in the three religions rather than the differences. Pi's father represents bafflement or apathy. He makes a vague attempt to protest Pi's position but ultimately simply sends Pi away. Pi's mother represents reason. She tries to reason with Pi, offer analogies, and ultimately exhausts herself in her inability to dissuade him from his beliefs.

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

She is exhausted from trying to debate a matter of faith from a rational standpoint.

CHAPTER 27

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

Politics, especially the political situation in India, begins to impose itself on the lives of Pi's family. The family's emigration to Canada is clearly foreshadowed.

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

Mr. Patel says that one must adapt to new technology or go the way of the dinosaur, echoing Darwin's theory of evolution. This is significant because it equates human society and the need for the species to adapt with the natural world and the need to be able to adapt.

CHAPTERS 28 - 29

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

He compares it to a refreshing monsoon rain.

2. What causes the Patel family to leave India?

Mr. Patel is alarmed by the fact that Mrs. Gandhi, the president of India, completely destroys the government of Tamil Nadu, the Indian state that includes Pondicherry. He thinks that Mrs. Gandhi has too much power and will eventually turn India into a police state. He thinks that he has no choice but to leave India.

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

The fact that the animals neither know nor care about world politics illustrates the irrelevance of such matters to real life.

CHAPTER 30

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

The writer meets Pi's wife, Meena. Until now, the writer did not know that Pi was married.

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

The writer says that “life has taught [Pi] not to show off what is most precious to him.” Along with the hints we had earlier, this is further evidence that Pi has experienced a great loss.

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

Meena is a pharmacist.

CHAPTERS 31 - 32

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

Mr. Kumar, the teacher, represents pure science. In the past, he has asserted that he does not believe in God, only in science. Mr. Kumar, the baker, is a devout Muslim. He thinks that God manifests himself in nature. Both men admire the zebras, so their meeting represents the symbolic meeting of science and spirituality.

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

Clearly the novel is going to involve an odd cohabitation and the creation of a “herd” by an odd combination of creatures.

3. Why does zoomorphism occur? What does Pi's explanation foreshadow?

Pi thinks that zoomorphism happens because it is the only way for animals to make sense of their lives. For example, in the story Pi tells about the lion cubs bonding with a dog, he says that if the lions knew that their mother was dead, they would be sad. By bonding with another mother, even if it is a dog, they can better cope with their situations.

Again, this explanation foreshadows a series of events involving loss and the need for those left behind to rebuild new groups and make sense of their lives.

CHAPTERS 33 - 34

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

Again, all of the evidence so far indicates that, between India and Canada, Pi experienced a tremendous loss and a severe break with his past.

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

We learn nothing. We are not given so much as a physical description or a mention of age, size, etc.

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

Pi's account is factual and detailed. The author's account is sentimental.

CHAPTER 35

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

He is 16 years old.

2. Why 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?

Concern over the brand names available is Mrs. Patel's way of expressing her apprehension about leaving everything familiar behind and facing an entirely new life in a new country and culture.

Just as Pi said earlier that an animal removed from its known environment will become anxious, Pi's mother, preparing to leave her familiar surroundings, is reacting in a similar manner.

CHAPTER 36

1. What surprises the narrator in this chapter?

Pi has a son, a daughter, and a dog. The narrator said earlier that Pi hides everything precious to him; he seems to have kept his family hidden.

2. 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?

Some great tragedy has been hinted at, so the scene of cozy domestic life may be coming after some family tragedy.

PART TWO: The Pacific Ocean

CHAPTERS 37 - 38

1. How does Yann Martel begin this section of the novel on a surprising and suspenseful note?

The section begins with Pi encouraging Richard Parker and urging him to swim to the life boat. Then, it is suddenly revealed, almost as Pi himself realizes it, that Richard Parker is a Bengal tiger, and now Pi must share the life boat with him.

2. What important part of the plot does Chapter 38 provide?

This chapter contains mostly exposition, the story of how the ship sank and Pi came to be the only survivor.

3. What does Pi mean when he says, “the ship vanished into a pinprick hole on my map”?

Pi has told us he bought a map of the world to chart the family’s voyage. His comparison of the ship’s sinking to a “pinprick” suggests the smallness of the ship compared to the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

4. How does Martel manage to provide a note of humor even during this tense and suspenseful episode?

The final several sentences, in which Pi says he trusted the crew and then admits casually, “Only when they threw me overboard did I begin to have doubts” are mildly humorous.

CHAPTERS 39 - 40

1. How is Pi’s survival more an act of Providence than human action?

The life boat Pi falls into is still attached to the ship and will sink when the ship sinks. It is only when the zebra jumps into the boat that the animal’s weight and the force of his falling detaches the boat from the ship so Pi will be safe.

2. How does Pi’s survival illustrate his belief in the triumph of faith over reason?

Pi notes that he is orphaned and alone, has a tiger in front of him, sharks beneath him, and a storm raging all around him. He says that if he had thought rationally about it, he would have given up, but that “God only knows” why he struggled to survive.

CHAPTER 41

1. How again does Pi attribute his survival more to Providence than human action?

He begins the chapter by saying that it was the elements that allowed him to live.

2. How has Martel prepared the reader for the situation in the life boat?

First of all, there is all of Pi's previous talk about survival, animals' ability to adapt to changed surroundings, and odd animal cohabitations. In this episode, Pi finds himself on a lifeboat with a zebra and a tiger. Earlier, Pi told us the story of his father's starving a tiger to demonstrate how dangerous an animal it was. He also told us earlier about the two Mr. Kumars being intrigued by the zebra.

3. Why does Pi conclude the sailors threw him overboard into the lifeboat?

Pi decides that, rather than trying to save him, the sailors threw him overboard because there was a hyena in the lifeboat. He thinks that they wanted him to be the bait to get the hyena out of the boat so they could use it.

4. Why is it fortunate for Pi that the hyena is in the lifeboat?

If the hyena had not been in the lifeboat, the sailors would probably not have thrown Pi overboard. If they had not thrown him into the lifeboat, he would have stayed on the ship and "surely would have drowned."

CHAPTER 42

1. With what significant imagery and symbolism does Pi describe the arrival of Orange Juice, the Orangutan?

Pi describes her arrival in terms suggesting she is a sun goddess or the Virgin Mary, an icon of benevolence and nurturing love.

2. How does he continue to describe the orangutan herself?

He calls her a matriarch and the "mother of two fine boys."

CHAPTER 43

1. Why is Pi so confident that he will be rescued? What does this reveal about his personality?

Pi is still a child mentally and emotionally and has a child's trust. He imagines cities around the world hearing of the disaster and immediately launching rescue attempts.

2. How does Pi characterize the hyena?

Pi, who has demonstrated his love, respect, and understanding of all animals, characterizes the hyena as unintelligent (almost insane in its irrational running around the perimeter of the boat), ugly, and disgusting in its eating and hygienic habits. The hyena seems to have no redeeming qualities whatsoever.

3. What surprising fact about the hyena does Pi share?

Most people believe that the hyena is a scavenger, a carrion eater, when in fact the hyena is a voracious predator.

CHAPTER 44

1. Why does Pi dislike the nighttime worst of all?

Pi hates to be on the boat at night. For one thing, a rescue ship cannot see him at night. For another, the hyena, a nocturnal animal, may be more active in the dark. This is especially worrisome, since the hyena is also the biggest threat to Pi.

2. What happens to the flies?

The hyena eats them.

CHAPTER 45

1. What evidence is presented that Pi's ordeal is beginning to skew his former values? Why is this change significant?

Pi, already established as an animal-lover, feels little sympathy for the zebra, first suffering with a broken leg, now suffering from the leg's having been bitten off by the hyena. He admits that he is suffering so much himself, he has no energy left to feel sympathy for another suffering creature. Any change of values as a result of hardship is significant in literature, especially in a novel that is adhering to the form of a bildungsroman.

2. Why does Pi laugh at the sight of Orange Juice's seasickness?

The orangutan is the most human of all of the animals on the boat, and Pi is probably able to relate to her better. Her seasickness looks like a parody of human seasickness, and he loses his own sickness as he watches her.

CHAPTER 46

1. Explain why Pi is not able to identify a "worst night"?

Pi explains that he has had so many bad nights, that, in its own way, each of them was the worst.

2. What is implied by Pi's now talking about refusing to label a "worst night"?

The implication is clear that he is going to follow with a discussion of one of those "worst nights."

3. What occurs during this night to make it a candidate for "worst night"?

This is the night that Pi accepts the probability that his family is dead.

4. How does Martel enhance the emotional impact of this chapter?

Martel has Pi unable to continue his story when he is discussing the impact of losing his family.

CHAPTER 47

1. What is the point of knowing that Orange Juice was a discarded pet?

Pi is pointing out that the orangutan is the closest to human of all of the animals. She has been domesticated and learned to love a human family as her own.

2. What does Pi focus on while watching the fight between Orange Juice and the hyena, especially while Orange Juice is being killed?

Pi focuses on the fear in the orangutan's eyes and how nearly human it is.

3. When does Pi discover Richard Parker?

Pi is on his way to kill the hyena after the hyena has killed Orange Juice.

4. What is significant about the fact that Richard Parker and Orange Juice have names, but the zebra and the hyena do not?

Naming animals might suggest the extent to which they are valued by humans. The author may have named Richard Parker and Orange Juice to show their relationship to the Patel family. Richard Parker and Orange Juice might also represent more “humanized” animals while the hyena and the zebra represent less-domesticated animals.

CHAPTERS 48 - 49

1. How did Richard Parker get his name?

A hunter was sent to kill a rogue panther in Bangladesh. As he was keeping watch one night, he saw, instead, a tiger and her cub. He captured both tigers. When the paperwork was written up for the sale of the animals, the clerk mistakenly typed the hunter's name, Richard Parker, as the name of the cub. That is the name with which the cub came to the Pondicherry Zoo.

2. What surprises Pi about the discovery of Richard Parker?

Pi wonders how he could have gone so long (two and one half days) without seeing such a large animal on such a small boat.

3. When staring at the hyena, what terms does Pi begin to use when speaking of himself? Why is this significant? What might it foreshadow?

Pi begins to speak of himself in animal terms. He wonders whether the hyena regards him as the “super-alpha” or the leader of the pack. This is significant because earlier, Pi was too absorbed in his own suffering to be overly sympathetic to the suffering of the zebra. Now he is hoping to be identified as a leader among the animals. This might foreshadow a further devolution from human to animal as Pi's survival crisis continues.

4. On what note does this chapter end? What kind of shift does this represent?

The chapter ends on a thoroughly practical, pragmatic note. Pi, who all along has indulged in philosophical musings and has tried to explain every aspect of animal behavior and the interaction between animals, is now concerned simply with not dying of thirst.

CHAPTER 50

1. Structurally, why is *this* the chapter Martel chooses to describe the life boat in detail?

In the previous chapter, Pi lost his inquisitive, philosophical bent and began to worry only about the practical. That is carried over into this chapter's description of the life boat.

2. How likely is the adult Pi, years after the event, to remember such specific details? Is it important whether or not these details are factual? Why or why not?

On the one hand, having survived the ordeal, it is entirely possible that Pi would remember every detail for the remainder of his life. On the other hand, even during the occurrence itself, Pi is not in the clearest mental state, so his memory might indeed be clouded. Whether or not his account is factual, however, is probably not important, as he is certainly giving us the essential truth of his experience. This will be a recurring issue in the novel, especially after Pi finally reaches land.

3. Compare and categorize the animals with which Pi's boat is populated.

Originally, there were four animals: two named and two unnamed, two predators and two prey, and three noble and beautiful animals and one hideous animal.

Hyena: unnamed, hideous predator

Zebra: unnamed, beautiful prey

Orange Juice: named, beautiful prey

Richard Parker: named, beautiful predator

CHAPTER 51

1. What is ironic about the location of the storage locker?

The storage locker is under the tarpaulin, in Richard Parker's "den." In order for Pi to access those supplies provided to preserve his life, he will have to risk his life by exposing himself to the tiger.

2. Why does Martel employ so much hyperbole in Pi's description of the water and the rations in the locker?

Martel is emphasizing the extent of Pi's suffering and deprivation prior to his finding the locker.

3. Why is Pi so grateful for the supplies he finds? What does he confess he felt about them?

Pi confesses that he felt as though the supplies were put in that locker especially for him.

CHAPTER 52

1. What is the purpose of this chapter?

In Pi's situation, even the smallest and most ordinary item becomes precious. This is also a pause in Pi's narrative to illustrate that mundane pragmatic details have become the focus of Pi's life, not great philosophical and spiritual questions.

2. How accurate can we assume Pi's memory is of the contents of the storage locker? Does it matter?

As in the previous chapter, it is ambiguous whether the adult Pi could remember such minute details clearly and accurately. But the complete accuracy of the details is unimportant in that Pi is simply showing us both the abundance—and the finiteness—of his survival materials.

CHAPTER 53

1. What is ironic about the rejuvenation the food and water bring to Pi?

While, on the one hand, Pi is refreshed and strengthened, on the other hand, he is now more aware of his predicament, and better able to mourn the loss of everything he has known and everything he might ever accomplish.

2. What change in Richard Parker coincides with Pi's regaining his own strength and lucidity?

Just as Pi has regained his strength, Richard Parker, who had been listless and passive up until now, suddenly regains his strength as well and attacks and kills the hyena.

3. What turns Pi's outlook around just as he is at the depth of his sorrow?

Without really thinking about it, Pi begins to pray. He makes a promise to himself and to God that "as long as God is with [him], he will not die."

4. Analyze the language Pi uses to describe Richard Parker.

Pi describes the tiger as a wondrous beast, something created by an artist. He says that the tiger's stance is like a pose, a "display of mighty art." There is a "lithesome grace" to the tiger's stance and presence. Pi describes the tiger's coat with words like, "flame-colored," "glossy," and "incomparably beautiful."

5. What is ironic about Pi's obvious admiration of the tiger?

While Pi obviously admires the tiger's physical beauty and power, it is clear that Pi considers the tiger to be the greatest threat to his survival.

CHAPTER 54

1. What narrative technique, a version of which he used in Chapter 52, does Martel use in this chapter?

Much of this chapter is a list—this one, a list of various plans Pi can use to get rid of the threat of Richard Parker.

2. At what plan does Pi finally arrive?

Pi finally arrives at what he considers to be the simplest, yet most effective, of all plans. He will simply let nature take its course and, eventually, the tiger will die of thirst.

CHAPTER 55

1. The transition between Chapters 54 and 55 introduces a technique that Martel will use several times throughout the rest of the novel. What shift in emotions and tone occurs between the end of the one chapter and the beginning of the next?

The previous chapter ends on a mildly positive note, with Pi believing, at night, that he has devised a plan to survive. The next chapter brings the daylight when Pi realizes the foolishness of his plan and once again doubts his ability to survive.

CHAPTER 56

1. What does Pi consider to be “life’s only opponent”? How is this consistent with other character traits we know Pi to possess?

Pi says that fear is the only thing that can “defeat life.” This is consistent with Pi’s being a person of faith.

2. Given what Pi tells the author about fear, why is he telling the author his story?

Pi says that the only way to conquer fear is to express it, to fight to find the words with which to articulate it. It is probable that he is telling this story to the author precisely to keep his fear at bay and prevent it from devouring him.

CHAPTER 57

1. What is prusten?

Prusten is a very soft noise that tigers make to signal an observer that they mean no harm.

2. What is the significance of Richard Parker's prusten in this chapter?

The prusten signals to Pi that, as long as he is well fed and watered, the tiger will not prove to be an immediate threat. It also signals how much of the untamed nature of a wild animal is based on meeting that animals' physical needs.

3. Compare the end of this chapter with the beginning of Chapter 56. What is ironic about Pi's thinking?

In the beginning of Chapter 56, Pi reflects on the dangerous and demoralizing nature of fear. At the end of this chapter, he is hoping to use Richard Parker's fear of the water to keep himself alive.

4. How has Pi prepared us for his decision to "tame" Richard Parker? What do we already know will be the result?

In Chapters 13 and 14, Pi described the process of "taming" wild circus animals. We know that such animals are never really tamed, but they are convinced that the human is the Alpha animal and they are "socially inferior" to the Alpha.

CHAPTER 58

1. Why does Pi tell us the highlights from the survival guide he finds on the lifeboat?

Pi has already demonstrated an affection for lists. This is also probably an attempt on Mertel's part to introduce some humor into the tense situation.

2. What is significant, in terms of Pi's coming of age, about the fact that he decides no longer to dwell on being rescued? How might the survival manual symbolize this?

In terms of his coming of age, Pi is beginning to learn to rely on himself rather than on outside help. This might be suggested by the utter uselessness of the survival manual. Pi is going to have to learn his own way.

CHAPTER 59

1. Why does Pi go into such laborious detail about the effect of the drag of the raft on the lifeboat?

The drag of the raft on the life boat and the way the life boat rocks is important because Richard Parker is prone to seasickness. If Pi can control when the tiger is ill, he can guarantee himself access to the storage locker with the survival supplies.

2. In what ways does Pi realize that he is not alone?

Pi is floating on a sea that is teeming with life.

3. Why hadn't Pi noticed the abundance of life in the ocean before? What does he say is the best way to experience wildlife?

While on board the Tsimtsum, he was traveling too fast. Only dolphins could keep up with the ship. He says that the best way to see wildlife is "on foot," (i.e., slowly) and "quietly." It is only by slowing down that a person can actually see the intricate details of nature.

4. What is the effect of the personification Pi uses to describe the sunset over the Pacific?

By personifying Nature, and events in the Natural world, Pi emphasizes that he is not alone. He has also begun to realize that his life and death are not important to the universe. As he lets go of his own importance, he begins to perceive the rhythm, beauty, and harmony of the universe. This is also why he can appreciate the beauty and nobility of Richard Parker without factoring in his own well being.

CHAPTER 60

1. What is suggested by Pi's reference to the Hindu story of the sage Markandeya?

The sage Markandeya is (accidentally) granted a glimpse of the entire universe, and he is ultimately saved from destruction by his god Vishnu. Pi is suggesting that his nighttime experience is a similar sort of unintentional divine revelation.

2. What does viewing the ocean at night teach Pi about his predicament?

Pi is able to put his troubles into the broader context of the entire, grand Universe. He is able to recognize how finite and minute his current trouble is.

3. Which two of his faiths does Pi draw on during his nighttime epiphany?

His epiphany about the vastness of the Universe and the finite nature of his suffering is a result of his Hinduism, and he concludes the chapter with a Muslim prayer.

CHAPTER 61

1. Thematically, why does this chapter immediately follow Chapter 60?

In the previous chapter—at night—Pi came to the realization of the minuteness of his own suffering in the context of the grandness of the Universe. Now, in the daytime, he has his first significant breakthrough in securing food for himself and Richard Parker.

2. What is almost Providential about the arrival of the school of flying fish?

The flying fish arrive just at the point when Pi is at his lowest, fearing that he will not have sufficient food for Richard Parker and that the tiger will eventually attack and eat him.

3. How do Pi's myriad faiths interact in this chapter?

On the one hand, the vegetarian Hindu Pi is repulsed at having to kill other living things—the flying fish. Yet, it is, interestingly enough, Pi's Christianity and Islam that give him the words to express that he felt "guilty as Cain."

4. Why, according to Pi, did he weep over the having to kill the flying fish, yet he killed the dorado triumphantly? What is significant about Pi's second explanation?

Pi offers two explanations. First, he says that he was caught up in the victory of capturing the fish, that catching the Dorado was a victory, an act of retaliation against the Natural World for his predicament. Finally, however, he admits that a human can grow accustomed to anything—even killing.

This second explanation is further evidence of Pi's descent into animal brutality.

CHAPTER 62

1. What effect does Martel create by having Pi tell the author, "I spied with my little eye a tiger"? How is this effect achieved?

This is another attempt at mild, ironic humor. The game "I Spy" was one of the ridiculous suggestions for passing the time in the survival manual. Suggesting this game as a pastime clearly trivializes the plight of the castaway. Richard Parker represents the greatest threat to Pi's survival. For Pi to talk about waking up and facing this threat in terms of the childish game is ironically humorous.

2. In what ways are the solar stills "sea cows"?

Pi's calling the stills sea cows most likely refers to the similarity of the water-collection bags to a cow's udder.

3. Why does Richard Parker go back under the tarpaulin when Pi blows his whistle?

Pi is slowly gaining control over the tiger. He has fed and watered him a second time. When he blows the whistle again, it is to stress that he controls Richard Parker's food and drink. Hearing the whistle, Richard Parker goes back under the tarp to yield to Pi, who is establishing himself as the alpha male.

CHAPTER 63

1. How long was Pi shipwrecked?

227 days, over 7 months total

2. Why does Pi bother to tell us how long others have lasted at sea?

He lists these survival rates so we can compare others' experiences with his.

3. Why does Martel rely yet again on the list as his narrative technique?

Pi survived for over seven months at sea (227 days), and every day was very much like every other day. Listing Pi's daily routine is one way of emphasizing the day-after-day sameness of the ordeal.

4. What role does prayer play in Pi's routine? What does this emphasize about his character?

Prayer plays a huge part in Pi's routine. Every section of his day has a prayer time. This emphasizes that Pi is a person of faith, not merely one who participates in the rituals of religion.

5. What is significant about Pi's admission to not keeping track of time?

We are not hearing the account of Pi's adventure in the order in which the events and realizations happened. He is simply telling about them as he remembers them.

CHAPTERS 64 - 65

1. How is Pi's utter inability to control, or even to observe, where his boat goes an ironic contradiction of an earlier realization of his?

Earlier, Pi concluded that, if he was going to survive, it would have to be on his own effort. He could not rely on any outside help. Now, however, he cannot control where the boat is going. He cannot chart a course, he would not know where to chart a course to, and he does not have the means to follow the course were he to chart one. So, in this aspect, Pi is completely dependent on outside forces.

CHAPTERS 66 - 67

1. What does the end of this chapter suggest?

Pi ends this chapter lamenting that he had “descended to a level of savagery [he] never imagined possible.” This suggests that (1) he is likely to descend even further before the novel is finished, and (2) the necessities of survival are not always compatible with spiritual ideals (like Hindu vegetarianism).

2. What benefits does Pi derive from the tiny forms of sea life that develop on and around the raft and life boat?

Some of the tiny creatures provide Pi with food while the entire civilization provides him with distracting entertainment.

3. Of what thematic significance is the development of sea life around the raft and boat?

Rather than being merely foreign objects floating on the ocean, the raft and boat are becoming part of the ocean community.

CHAPTERS 68 - 69

1. Explain Pi's circle references and how he determines his odds of being rescued by a ship.

The horizon represents a circle with Pi at the center. The closer Pi is to sea level, the shorter will be the radius of the horizon-circle—less than two-and-a-half miles—and, thus, the diameter (less than five miles) and, thus, the circumference. Pi calculates that there is virtually no chance, given the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, for a ship to coincidentally enter the tiny circle of Pi's sight.

2. What does Pi express about the ambivalence of smell-induced memory?

While at sea, the fired flares smelled like the cooking spice, cumin, which reminded Pi of home. Now that he is an adult on dry land, the smell of cumin reminds Pi of the signal flares and being at sea.

CHAPTERS 70 - 71

1. On what note does Chapter 70 end? What theme does this emphasize?

Chapter 70 ends with Pi's decision that he must be more intentional in taking control of Richard Parker and establishing his territory on the life boat. The theme being expressed is Pi's descent from humanity into animalism. Now, like an animal, he is concerned with establishing his territory.

2. What narrative technique does Martel again return to while discussing Pi's mastery of Richard Parker?

Once again, Martel resorts to a numbered list.

3. What is the goal of Pi's training methods?

He wants to get Richard Parker to the point where he only has to blow a whistle to make the tiger retreat to his place under the tarpaulin.

4. What do Pi's concerns about not making Richard Parker too sick and making certain the tiger has enough food and water suggest about Pi's character? What is ironic about this?

Despite his protests to the contrary, Pi is still humane enough not to want to make a fellow living being suffer unnecessarily. These are concerns based, not on a primal survival instinct, but on a higher, spiritual belief.

CHAPTER 72

1. Why, according to Pi, did Richard Parker not really want to attack him?

Pi reminds us that, in the wild, a physical conflict between two animals will most likely result in the death of one of them. Even for tigers, violence is the last result because the tiger "knows" that a fight will mean "kill or be killed."

2. How does Pi finally gain the mastery over Richard Parker that he has desired?

Being the food provider proves to be insufficient. The threat of physical violence proves to be insufficient. But when Pi is able to demonstrate that he has control over whether Richard Parker feels well or seasick, the tiger stops fighting back.

CHAPTER 73

1. What does having a book represent to Pi?

The words and ideas contained in a book would mean some form of human contact for Pi. He would also be able to read messages of hope and encouragement.

2. Why is Pi so moved by the Gideon Bible he once found in a Canadian hotel room?

He sees placing a book of scripture, a book of spiritual guidance and sustenance, into the hands of possibly weary and discouraged travelers a wonderfully generous gesture. He says that this is a much better way to spread the truths of a religion than booming sermons from a pulpit.

3. Why does Pi begin to keep his diary?

He does not specifically say, but it clearly has to do with the need to communicate, have some form of human interaction, and find encouragement.

CHAPTER 74

1. Why is it significant that Pi is able to maintain some form of religious devotion even without the trapping of religion?

Pi is learning the difference between faith and religion, that God can be worshipped and prayed to without the intercession of a priest or kneeling on a prayer rug facing Mecca.

2. Why does Pi say it was hard to maintain faith?

Pi describes faith as an act of letting go and trusting, and he has found it very difficult to let go and trust during his ordeal.

3. What is the primary theme of this chapter?

The primary theme of this chapter has something to do with the triumph of faith over mere religion and over intense suffering. Even while fearing for his life and suffering the privations he has been suffering, Pi maintains his observances of faith. He prays even without the prescribed trappings of his three professed religions. He is also to find humor and strength in the deterioration of his clothes, shouting out that it is God's pants that are deteriorating, God's hat that is falling apart, etc.

CHAPTERS 75 AND 76

1. What is the most significant contrast between these two chapters? What theme is Martel emphasizing with Pi's detailed discussion of feces?

In these two chapters, Pi is a loving son singing "Happy Birthday" to his mother, and a base animal using another animal's feces to maintain his animal dominance. Martel is establishing the theme of Pi's continual descent from the spiritual to the base.

CHAPTER 77

1. Of what is Pi's adoration of turtle flesh, eggs, and the versatility of turtle shells reminiscent?

This section is reminiscent of some of the suggestions in the survival manual in Chapter 58.

2. When the biscuits are finished, what does Pi turn to for food?

At this point in his struggle to survive, Pi will eat anything.

3. Why does Pi find that the connection between food and emotional well being is frightening?

As a spiritual being, Pi had always been taught and believed that happiness and satisfaction came from things other than physical pleasures and comfort. But when one is reduced to one's lowest, happiness hinges on one thought: whether or not one's belly is full.

CHAPTER 78

1. What effect is Martel achieving by opening this chapter with descriptions of the "many skies" and "many seas"?

As he has already done a few times already, Martel is trying to convey a sense of the passing of endless time. This time he focuses on the changing appearance of the ocean and the sky as day follows day.

2. Explain the mathematical allusion Pi makes.

Pi says “to be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle.” He adds, “[a castaway’s] gaze is always a radius” and “the circumference is never great.” These allusions are particularly appropriate for Pi because his nickname is the term that refers to the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter.

3. What does Pi say is “the worst pair of opposites” for someone stranded at sea?

He names boredom and terror.

CHAPTERS 79 - 80

1. What is the significance of Richard Parker’s encounter with the shark?

This is the first time—quite possibly in Richard Parker’s entire life—that his prey has fought back and caused him injury.

2. To what is Pi alluding when he thanks “Jesus-Matsya” after catching the big fish?

In the Gospels of Matthew and John, one of Jesus’ most notable miracles was feeding five thousand people with only two fishes and five loaves of bread. In Hinduism, Matsya is a part-man, part-fish incarnation of the god Vishnu. Clearly, Pi, who is a devotee of both Hinduism and Christianity, is combining the two notions into a single prayer of gratitude for the catch of a huge fish.

3. How does Pi establish his mastery of Richard Parker in this episode?

Pi establishes his mastery simply by the force of his will.

CHAPTERS 81 - 82

1. What is the actual key to Pi’s “dominance” over Richard Parker?

Pi is Richard Parker’s main provider of food and water, so Richard Parker never attacks him.

2. At what heartbreaking realization does Pi arrive in Chapter 82? Why is this development significant?

Pi realizes that he eats as hastily, as ravenously, as indiscriminately, and as noisily as an animal—as Richard Parker. This is significant because Pi’s coming of age seems to involve his descent from spiritual humanity to a form of savagery.

CHAPTER 83

1. What is the significance of this storm at this point in Pi's narrative?

This is the worst storm Pi has experienced, and it costs him a great deal of what he has accomplished before. If Pi is going to experience any sort of despair, it is going to be as a result of this storm.

2. On what note does this chapter end?

The chapter ends on the suspenseful note that Pi has little chance left to survive. The sea has taken his provisions, and he has only one orange whistle left with which to maintain his dominance over Richard Parker.

CHAPTERS 84 - 85

1. What is the point of Pi's fantasy about the whales?

Pi is alone, bereft of friends and family. His one constant companion is also a constant threat to his life. He has several times claimed to believe he is also in the presence of God, but the whales offer him the opportunity to imagine a real and physical and caring presence.

2. Why is Pi so positively affected by the lightning storm?

For Pi, it is a moment of wonder, both the same as and the opposite of the calm, starry night when he realized the vastness of the Universe. Any revelation of divinity—like the starry sky and the powerful lightning bolts—provides Pi the opportunity to focus his thoughts on bigger things than his own personal suffering.

CHAPTER 86

1. What is suggested by the fact that no one on the oil tanker sees Pi?

Pi's lifeboat is so close to the tanker, and it bears upon him so quickly and passes so quickly—with no apparent threat of collision or capsizing. Plus, no one sees or hears Pi either on the boat's approach or departure. All of this suggests that the ship was merely an illusion.

2. At the end of this chapter, Pi tells Richard Parker that he loves him. Why does Pi love Richard Parker?

If he did not have Richard Parker, Pi would be completely alone. Also, Richard Parker is another living soul, a being who has suffered and struggled to survive even as Pi has.

CHAPTERS 87 - 88

1. What is the significance of Pi's newfound method of "escape"?

It seems as though Pi is playing with death, toying, perhaps with suicide.

2. What is the point of Pi's encountering the trash?

After so many days at sea—representing the natural world—the first inkling of humanity that Pi encounters is evidence of humanity's pollution of that natural world.

CHAPTERS 89 - 90

1. What is the point of Pi's having run out of ink before he ran out of paper?

Clearly, the ink and the paper represent something, possibly the substance of survival versus the spirit. Earlier, Pi thought the biggest challenge to his survival would have been running out of supplies, but now it is his will that is faltering.

2. What is the symbolic significance of blindness? What might this suggest about Pi?

Blindness typically represents a lack of knowledge or understanding, an inability to perceive a truth. Pi's blindness could represent that, on a symbolic or metaphorical level, he cannot see, or is not aware, of the truth of his situation.

3. What saddens Pi the most about his continual deterioration?

Pi is upset because he can no longer care for Richard Parker.

4. What clue do we have that Pi's account of the episode with the blind Frenchman might not be precisely factual?

It is highly unlikely that two blind castaways, drifting aimlessly and with no awareness of or control over their whereabouts, would by sheer coincidence meet one another in the Pacific Ocean.

5. What theme does Pi's story about the man finding the banana and feeling better suggest?

Pi's use of stories to bolster his and the Frenchman's spirits illustrates the importance of story to human survival—especially emotional and psychological survival.

6. What happens emotionally to Pi with the death of the Frenchman?

He says, "Something in me died then that has never come back to life." The Frenchman's death has altered Pi irrevocably.

CHAPTER 91

1. What is significant about how Pi recovers from his blindness?

Pi's tears—expressions of grief and remorse—clear out his eyes and restore his sight.

2. What climactic event occurs in this chapter?

Pi descends into cannibalism.

CHAPTER 92

1. How does Pi justify the episode he is about to tell about his time on the island?

Pi admits that many people will not believe this part, but that it is “part of the story and it happened to [him].”

2. Why does Pi rely so heavily on the survival manual's instructions when disembarking onto the island?

Pi has to be careful that what he thinks is an island won't turn out to be a mirage, an illusion.

3. List some of the mysteries Pi comes to discover about the island.

The island appears to be free-floating and made completely of algae. The algae is edible and tastes sweet. The island is dotted with hundreds of freshwater ponds. The island is populated by hundreds of meerkats, who have no fear of predators. At night, the island, which appears hilly in the daytime, flattens out. At night, dead fish float to the surface of the freshwater pools, but by daylight they are gone. The meerkats sleep in the trees at night and return to their burrows in the morning. Richard Parker, who is content to leave the lifeboat every morning and roam the island, returns to the boat every night. One night he returns late to the boat, obviously distressed and licking his paws. The one time Pi touches the island at night with his bare feet, he feels a stinging, burning pain. Pi discovers what he thinks is a fruit-bearing tree, but the fruit turns out to be curled leaves with a human tooth at the center of each.

4. Why does Richard Parker continue killing animals, even after he is no longer hungry?

As a predatory animal, Richard Parker has an instinct to hunt. All those months at sea have caused him to keep his hunting instinct pent up. He kills to eat, but he also kills simply to satisfy his urge to kill.

5. What is the likely symbolic significance of this island?

Taking into consideration the ease with which Pi is able to secure food and water and the native meerkats' lack of fear of predators—all conditions Pi told us earlier were the “two relentless imperatives of the wild”—the island is reminiscent of the biblical Garden of Eden. The apparently fruit-bearing tree in the center also supports this interpretation. When the tree's “fruit,” however, turns out to be curled leaves with human teeth in the center, the entire nature of the island changes in Pi's perception, and he flees. This Eden, then, is tainted, illusory. After everything Pi has experienced on the life boat, he cannot return to a state of innocence at all resembling what he knew in his home in India.

6. Structurally, why do you think the author chose to place the island episode where he did in the novel?

This chapter, symbolically Pi's return to carefree innocence. The horrendous realization that he cannot be innocent again, immediately follows the most horrible incident in Pi's fight for survival—his descent into cannibalism.

CHAPTERS 93 AND 94

1. Why does Pi and Richard Parker's parting bother Pi so much?

For 227 days, Pi has essentially kept Richard Parker alive, providing him with food and drinking water. He “tamed” Richard Parker to the extent that the tiger accepted him as the Alpha male in their little streak of two. (A group of tigers is called either a “streak” or an “ambush.”) It, therefore, bothers Pi that Richard Parker is able to run off with no sense of farewell or gratitude—no emotion that would be appropriate at a human parting.

2. Why, according to Pi, is it important to “conclude things properly”?

Pi says that it is only by “conclud[ing] things properly” that one can let go of them. Not to conclude something properly will be to forever live with regret.

3. Why does Pi say he turned to God after leaving the island?

He says that people naturally turn to God in the depths of despair.

PART THREE: Benito Juarez Infirmary, Tomatlan, Mexico

CHAPTERS 95 AND 96

1. Why have members of the Japanese Ministry of Transport come to interview Pi?

Since the Tsimtsum was a Japanese ship, it is the responsibility of the Japanese government to investigate the accident that caused it to sink. They have come to record Pi's account of what happened to the ship.

2. What is significant about the numerous difficulties the Japanese men experience in their attempt to get to Pi and interview him? What do we learn about them in their private exchanges in Japanese that the author includes in his transcript?

The men themselves seem incompetent in their attempt to read the map, negotiate with car rental companies and auto mechanics, and find their way to Pi. This mirrors the incompetence Pi notes in the crew of the Tsimtsum. Their responses to Pi's requests for food and their preoccupation with their own hunger suggest that they are oblivious to Pi's condition or the nature of the ordeal he has endured.

CHAPTERS 97 - 98

1. What is the purpose of Chapter 97?

We already know that the author—at Pi's request—is trying to write his book, tell Pi's story, in exactly one hundred chapters. This is a tactic to make that happen. It is evidence of the story's being crafted for effect rather than related for the sake of its factual accuracy.

2. What element has Martel reintroduced into the novel by presenting translations of the interviewers' Japanese side remarks in his transcript of Pi's interview?

The interviewers' side comments, which Pi presumably cannot understand because the men are speaking to each other in Japanese, bring some humor back into the novel. The men express their hunger, their disbelief, their wish that they had taken the day off, all in contrast to the seriousness of their official business and the horrors of Pi's story.

3. What types of characters are the two interviewers?

In the way they conduct their business and their reactions to Pi's tale, the interviewers are both clowns and foils for Pi.

4. Why do you suppose Pi hoards the cookies?

Pi has experienced severe privation and been on the point of starvation numerous times in the past seven months. He has learned to hoard food while it is plentiful so that he can survive on the reserves when food becomes scarce.

CHAPTER 99

1. What point about how people live their lives does Pi make when Okamoto asks why no one else has ever seen the island of algae?

Pi says that most people travel too quickly to notice things. He was traveling slow and saw everything.

2. Thematically, what is the significance of the rapid and witty exchange between Pi and Mr. Okamoto about the truth of Pi's story? What viewpoints are represented by Pi and the interviewers?

This exchange gets at the nature of truth and humankind's ambivalent search for it. Pi equates the interviewers' disbelief with the disbelief of those who doubted Copernicus and Darwin—because those scientists proposed ideas that contradicted what was currently “known.” When Mr. Okamoto insists that the floating island of algae contradicts the laws of nature, Pi counters by questioning whether Okamoto honestly thinks the laws of nature are already absolutely known. In this exchange, Pi represents the philosopher or scientist always struggling to push beyond the boundaries of what is known to discover what is not yet known. The interviewers represent the complacent masses who believe there is nothing new to be discovered.

3. How does Pi defend the story of his survival when Mr. Okamoto challenges it as unbelievable? What is his response when Mr. Okamoto protests that he believes only what he sees?

Pi points out that other things, like love and the existence of God, are also hard to believe. Pi also reminds Mr. Okamoto that Christopher Columbus also believed only what he saw—he'd landed on a continent previously unknown to Europeans, and he thought he had to be on land that was known. Pi asks Okamoto what he does in the dark when he sees nothing. Does he then believe nothing?

4. If we accept the Richard Parker story as an allegorical account of the factual, literal story, what do each of the characters in the allegory represent?

The zebra represents the Chinese sailor. In the first story, the zebra has a broken leg. In the second, the Chinese sailor has a broken leg. The hyena is the French cook. In the first version of Pi's story, the hyena is hideous, in appearance and in action. This is what Pi thinks of the cook. Also, the hyena kills the zebra by biting off his leg. The cook cuts off the leg of the Chinese sailor, killing him. The orangutan is Pi's mother. Just as the orangutan slaps the hyena, so Pi's mother slaps the French cook. Later, as the orangutan and the hyena fight on the lifeboat, so do Pi's mother and the cook; and, as the hyena eventually kills the orangutan, the cook kills Pi's mother. Finally, the tiger, Richard Parker, represents the animal part of Pi himself. Pi kills the cook because the cook killed Pi's mother. Then, because he is starving, he eats the cook. In the first story, Richard Parker kills and eats the hyena.

5. Why do Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba say they think the story with the animals is the better story, even though they admit they do not believe it?

There are a couple of possible reasons. First of all, the story with the animals is a better "story." As Pi says, it is surprising, exciting, at times heartwarming, and is at least partially true. Secondly, if the second story is the factual account, they too may feel that the facts are too horrible to examine directly, so the first story is "better."

6. What is ironic about the presence of the interviewers in this novel? Why did Martel include them?

First, the Japanese men represent a rational corporate interest that has nothing to do with what happened to Pi. They actually believe that Pi's reluctance to talk about what happened is the result of his fear of legal action being taken against him! Second, they are most interested in the part of the story about which Pi know the least and about which he is least interested.

CHAPTER 100

1. Why does Martel never explain the cause of the ship's sinking?

Ultimately, in terms of the story, the cause of the shipwreck is irrelevant. Neither version of the story—nor the truth that underlies each—would be altered by knowing the cause.

2. What is interesting about the fact that this book ends at Chapter 100?

Earlier in the book, Pi asked the author if he could write a book in exactly one hundred chapters. This, to Pi, would represent closure, finality.

3. Why is it significant to the theme that the unnamed author learns of Pi's second story from the Japanese interviewers?

Pi's truth is still the story of Richard Parker. Were it not for Mr. Okamoto's letter to the author, the reader probably would not even consider the possibility that there might be a second version.

4. What is suggested by the closing line of Mr. Okamoto's letter to the author?

While, on the surface, it might seem that Okamoto has finally learned to recognize the validity of the Richard Parker version of Pi's story, his word choice indicates otherwise: "Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea as Mr. Patel, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger." The fact of Pi's being at sea for 227 days is not questioned. The idea of his being at sea with a tiger still is.

Life of Pi

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 its 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?

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

1. What is suggested by the fact that the Author's note was set in italics, and Chapter 1 is set in normal text?

2. Who do we assume is the speaker of Chapter 1? What suggests this?

3. Why did the person speaking in Chapter 1 choose to study the sloth?

4. What we can infer about Mr. Patel from his tone?

5. What is significant about the cities Mr. Patel says he would like to visit?

6. What were Mr. Patel's two majors in college? What connection does he make between the two? How do they foreshadow what is likely to come later in the novel?

7. What can we infer about the narrator so far?

CHAPTER 2

1. What do the language and format of this chapter establish for the reader?

2. What is significant about the details the fictional author chooses to reveal about Mr. Patel?

CHAPTER 3

1. What might the origin of Patel's name foreshadow?

2. What significant trait did the narrator and Mamaji share?

3. Who is the man Patel calls Mamaji, who teaches Patel how to swim? How have we already met him?

4. What does the name "Mamaji" mean?

5. What distinction does Mr. Patel make between the ocean and the swimming pool? What is the significance of this distinction?

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

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

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

CHAPTER 4

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

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

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

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

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

6. 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?

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

CHAPTER 5

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

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

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

CHAPTER 6

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

CHAPTER 7

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

2. Why does Mr. Kumar love the zoo?

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

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

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

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

7. What problem does Pi have with agnostics?

CHAPTER 8

1. 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”?

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

3. 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 this episode foreshadow?

CHAPTER 9

1. What is a “flight distance”?

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

CHAPTER 10

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

2. Why does Pi goes into such detail explaining how zoos work?

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

CHAPTER 11

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

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

CHAPTER 12

1. What does the narrator's saying that Pi Patel "bobs" on the "ocean of memory" foreshadow?

2. Who is Richard Parker who "preys on [Pi Patel's] mind"?

CHAPTER 13

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

2. 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

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

CHAPTER 15

1. What can be inferred from the religious artifacts that the author sees in Patel's house about the person who lives in that house?

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

CHAPTER 16

1. Explain Pi's concept of the Brahman nirguna.

2. What is Brahman saguna?

3. What does Pi say made him a Hindu?

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

CHAPTER 17

1. What confuses Pi about Christianity?

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

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

CHAPTER 18

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

2. What first impresses Pi about Islam?

CHAPTER 19

1. Why does Piscine like praying in the mosque?

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

CHAPTER 20

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

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

CHAPTER 21

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

2. What do the phrases, "dry, yeastless factuality" and "the better story" suggest?

CHAPTERS 22 - 23

1. 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?

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

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

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

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

6. What is the power of Pi's response to the competing religious men?

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

CHAPTERS 24 - 25

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

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

CHAPTER 26

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

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

CHAPTER 27

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

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

CHAPTERS 28 - 29

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

2. What causes the Patel family to leave India?

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

CHAPTER 30

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

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

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

CHAPTERS 31 - 32

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

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

3. Why does zoomorphism occur? What does Pi's explanation foreshadow?

CHAPTERS 33 - 34

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

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

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

CHAPTER 35

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

2. Why 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

1. What surprises the narrator in this chapter?

2. 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?

PART TWO: The Pacific Ocean**CHAPTERS 37 - 38**

1. How does Yann Martel begin this section of the novel on a surprising and suspenseful note?

2. What important part of the plot does Chapter 38 provide?

3. What does Pi mean when he says, “the ship vanished into a pinprick hole on my map”?

4. How does Martel manage to provide a note of humor even during this tense and suspenseful episode?

CHAPTERS 39 - 40

1. How is Pi's survival more an act of Providence than human action?

2. How does Pi's survival illustrate his belief in the triumph of faith over reason?

CHAPTER 41

1. How again does Pi attribute his survival more to Providence than human action?

2. How has Martel prepared the reader for the situation in the life boat?

3. Why does Pi conclude the sailors threw him overboard into the lifeboat?

4. Why is it fortunate for Pi that the hyena is in the lifeboat?

CHAPTER 42

1. With what significant imagery and symbolism does Pi describe the arrival of Orange Juice, the Orangutan?

2. How does he continue to describe the orangutan herself?

CHAPTER 43

1. Why is Pi so confident that he will be rescued? What does this reveal about his personality?

2. How does Pi characterize the hyena?

3. What surprising fact about the hyena does Pi share?

CHAPTER 44

1. Why does Pi dislike the nighttime worst of all?

2. What happens to the flies?

CHAPTER 45

1. What evidence is presented that Pi's ordeal is beginning to skew his former values? Why is this change significant?

2. Why does Pi laugh at the sight of Orange Juice's seasickness?

CHAPTER 46

1. Explain why Pi is not able to identify a “worst night”?

2. What is implied by Pi's now talking about refusing to label a “worst night”?

3. What occurs during this night to make it a candidate for “worst night”?

4. How does Martel enhance the emotional impact of this chapter?

CHAPTER 47

1. What is the point of knowing that Orange Juice was a discarded pet?

2. What does Pi focus on while watching the fight between Orange Juice and the hyena, especially while Orange Juice is being killed?

3. When does Pi discover Richard Parker?

4. What is significant about the fact that Richard Parker and Orange Juice have names, but the zebra and the hyena do not?

CHAPTERS 48 - 49

1. How did Richard Parker get his name?

2. What surprises Pi about the discovery of Richard Parker?

3. When staring at the hyena, what terms does Pi begin to use when speaking of himself? Why is this significant? What might it foreshadow?

4. On what note does this chapter end? What kind of shift does this represent?

CHAPTER 50

1. Structurally, why is *this* the chapter Martel chooses to describe the life boat in detail?

2. How likely is the adult Pi, years after the event, to remember such specific details? Is it important whether or not these details are factual? Why or why not?

3. Compare and categorize the animals with which Pi's boat is populated.

CHAPTER 51

1. What is ironic about the location of the storage locker?

2. Why does Martel employ so much hyperbole in Pi's description of the water and the rations in the locker?

3. Why is Pi so grateful for the supplies he finds? What does he confess he felt about them?

CHAPTER 52

1. What is the purpose of this chapter?

2. How accurate can we assume Pi's memory is of the contents of the storage locker? Does it matter?

CHAPTER 53

1. What is ironic about the rejuvenation the food and water bring to Pi?

2. What change in Richard Parker coincides with Pi's regaining his own strength and lucidity?

3. What turns Pi's outlook around just as he is at the depth of his sorrow?

4. Analyze the language Pi uses to describe Richard Parker.

5. What is ironic about Pi's obvious admiration of the tiger?

CHAPTER 54

1. What narrative technique, a version of which he used in Chapter 52, does Martel use in this chapter?

2. At what place does Pi finally arrive?

CHAPTER 55

1. The transition between Chapters 54 and 55 introduces a technique that Martel will use several times throughout the rest of the novel. What shift in emotions and tone occurs between the end of the one chapter and the beginning of the next?

CHAPTER 56

1. What does Pi consider to be “life’s only opponent”? How is this consistent with other character traits we know Pi to possess?

2. Given what Pi tells the author about fear, why is he telling the author his story?

CHAPTER 57

1. What is prusten?

2. What is the significance of Richard Parker's prusten in this chapter?

3. Compare the end of this chapter with the beginning of Chapter 56. What is ironic about Pi's thinking?

4. How has Pi prepared us for his decision to "tame" Richard Parker? What do we already know will be the result?

CHAPTER 58

1. Why does Pi tell us the highlights from the survival guide he finds on the lifeboat?

2. What is significant, in terms of Pi's coming of age, about the fact that he decides no longer to dwell on being rescued? How might the survival manual symbolize this?

CHAPTER 59

1. Why does Pi go into such laborious detail about the effect of the drag of the raft on the lifeboat?

2. In what ways does Pi realize that he is not alone?

3. Why hadn't Pi noticed the abundance of life in the ocean before? What does he say is the best way to experience wildlife?

4. What is the effect of the personification Pi uses to describe the sunset over the Pacific?

CHAPTER 60

1. What is suggested by Pi's reference to the Hindu story of the sage Markandeya?

2. What does viewing the ocean at night teach Pi about his predicament?

3. Which two of his faiths does Pi draw on during his nighttime epiphany?

CHAPTER 61

1. Thematically, why does this chapter immediately follow Chapter 60?

2. What is almost Providential about the arrival of the school of flying fish?

3. How do Pi's myriad faiths interact in this chapter?

4. Why, according to Pi, did he weep over the having to kill the flying fish, yet he killed the dorado triumphantly? What is significant about Pi's second explanation?

CHAPTER 62

1. What effect does Martel create by having Pi tell the author, “I spied with my little eye a tiger”? How is this effect achieved?

2. In what ways are the solar stills “sea cows”?

3. Why does Richard Parker go back under the tarpaulin when Pi blows his whistle?

CHAPTER 63

1. How long was Pi shipwrecked?

2. Why does Pi bother to tell us how long others have lasted at sea?

3. Why does Martel rely yet again on the list as his narrative technique?

4. What role does prayer play in Pi's routine? What does this emphasize about his character?

5. What is significant about Pi's admission to not keeping track of time?

CHAPTERS 64 - 65

1. How is Pi's utter inability to control, or even to observe, where his boat goes an ironic contradiction of an earlier realization of his?

CHAPTERS 66 - 67

1. What does the end of this chapter suggest?

2. What benefits does Pi derive from the tiny forms of sea life that develop on and around the raft and life boat?

3. Of what thematic significance is the development of sea life around the raft and boat?

CHAPTERS 68 - 69

1. Explain Pi's circle references and how he determines his odds of being rescued by a ship.

2. What does Pi express about the ambivalence of smell-induced memory?

CHAPTERS 70 - 71

1. On what note does Chapter 70 end? What theme does this emphasize?

2. What narrative technique does Martel again return to while discussing Pi's mastery of Richard Parker?

3. What is the goal of Pi's training methods?

4. What do Pi's concerns about not making Richard Parker too sick and making certain the tiger has enough food and water suggest about Pi's character? What is ironic about this?

CHAPTER 72

1. Why, according to Pi, did Richard Parker not really want to attack him?

2. How does Pi finally gain the mastery over Richard Parker that he has desired?

CHAPTER 73

1. What does having a book represent to Pi?

2. Why is Pi so moved by the Gideon Bible he once found in a Canadian hotel room?

3. Why does Pi begin to keep his diary?

CHAPTER 74

1. Why is it significant that Pi is able to maintain some form of religious devotion even without the trapping of religion?

2. Why does Pi say it was hard to maintain faith?

3. What is the primary theme of this chapter?

CHAPTERS 75 AND 76

1. What is the most significant contrast between these two chapters? What theme is Martel emphasizing with Pi's detailed discussion of feces?

CHAPTER 77

1. Of what is Pi's adoration of turtle flesh, eggs, and the versatility of turtle shells reminiscent?

2. When the biscuits are finished, what does Pi turn to for food?

3. Why does Pi find that the connection between food and emotional well being is frightening?

CHAPTER 78

1. What effect is Martel achieving by opening this chapter with descriptions of the "many skies" and "many seas"?

2. Explain the mathematical allusion Pi makes.

3. What does Pi say is "the worst pair of opposites" for someone stranded at sea?

CHAPTERS 79 - 80

1. What is the significance of Richard Parker's encounter with the shark?

2. To what is Pi alluding when he thanks "Jesus-Matsya" after catching the big fish?

3. How does Pi establish his mastery of Richard Parker in this episode?

CHAPTERS 81 - 82

1. What is the actual key to Pi's "dominance" over Richard Parker?

2. At what heartbreaking realization does Pi arrive in Chapter 82? Why is this development significant?

CHAPTER 83

1. What is the significance of this storm at this point in Pi's narrative?

2. On what note does this chapter end?

CHAPTERS 84 - 85

1. What is the point of Pi's fantasy about the whales?

2. Why is Pi so positively affected by the lightning storm?

CHAPTER 86

1. What is suggested by the fact that no one on the oil tanker sees Pi?

2. At the end of this chapter, Pi tells Richard Parker that he loves him. Why does Pi love Richard Parker?

CHAPTERS 87 - 88

1. What is the significance of Pi's newfound method of "escape"?

2. What is the point of Pi's encountering the trash?

CHAPTERS 89 - 90

1. What is the point of Pi's having run out of ink before he ran out of paper?

2. What is the symbolic significance of blindness? What might this suggest about Pi?

3. What saddens Pi the most about his continual deterioration?

4. What clue do we have that Pi's account of the episode with the blind Frenchman might not be precisely factual?

5. What theme does Pi's story about the man finding the banana and feeling better suggest?

6. What happens emotionally to Pi with the death of the Frenchman?

CHAPTER 91

1. What is significant about how Pi recovers from his blindness?

2. What climactic event occurs in this chapter?

CHAPTER 92

1. How does Pi justify the episode he is about to tell about his time on the island?

2. Why does Pi rely so heavily on the survival manual's instructions when disembarking onto the island?

3. List some of the mysteries Pi comes to discover about the island.

4. Why does Richard Parker continue killing animals, even after he is no longer hungry?

5. What is the likely symbolic significance of this island?

6. Structurally, why do you think the author chose to place the island episode where he did in the novel?

CHAPTERS 93 AND 94

1. Why does Pi and Richard Parker's parting bother Pi so much?

2. Why, according to Pi, is it important to "conclude things properly"?

3. Why does Pi say he turned to God after leaving the island?

PART THREE: Benito Juarez Infirmary, Tomatlan, Mexico**CHAPTERS 95 AND 96**

1. Why have members of the Japanese Ministry of Transport come to interview Pi?

2. What is significant about the numerous difficulties the Japanese men experience in their attempt to get to Pi and interview him? What do we learn about them in their private exchanges in Japanese that the author includes in his transcript?

CHAPTERS 97 - 98

1. What is the purpose of Chapter 97?

2. What element has Martel reintroduced into the novel by presenting translations of the interviewers' Japanese side remarks in his transcript of Pi's interview?

3. What types of characters are the two interviewers?

4. Why do you suppose Pi hoards the cookies?

CHAPTER 99

1. What point about how people live their lives does Pi make when Okamoto asks why no one else has ever seen the island of algae?

2. Thematically, what is the significance of the rapid and witty exchange between Pi and Mr. Okamoto about the truth of Pi's story? What viewpoints are represented by Pi and the interviewers?

3. How does Pi defend the story of his survival when Mr. Okamoto challenges it as unbelievable? What is his response when Mr. Okamoto protests that he believes only what he sees?

4. If we accept the Richard Parker story as an allegorical account of the factual, literal story, what do each of the characters in the allegory represent?

5. Why do Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba say they think the story with the animals is the better story, even though they admit they do not believe it?

6. What is ironic about the presence of the interviewers in this novel? Why did Martel include them?

CHAPTER 100

1. Why does Martel never explain the cause of the ship's sinking?

2. What is interesting about the fact that this book ends at Chapter 100?

3. Why is it significant to the theme that the unnamed author learns of Pi's second story from the Japanese interviewers?

4. What is suggested by the closing line of Mr. Okamoto's letter to the author?

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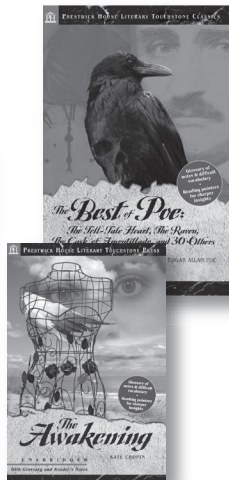
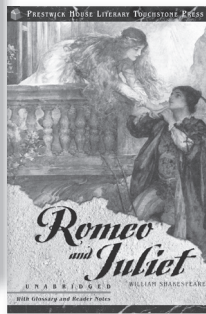
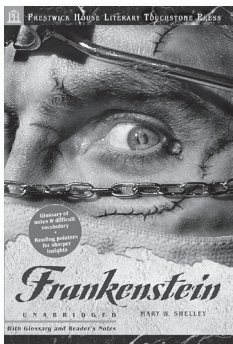
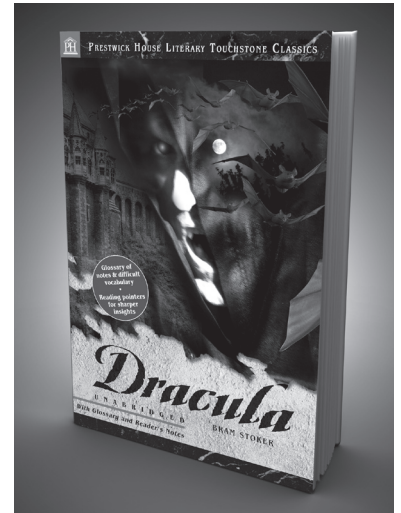
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