

Chapter Questions: Life of Pi

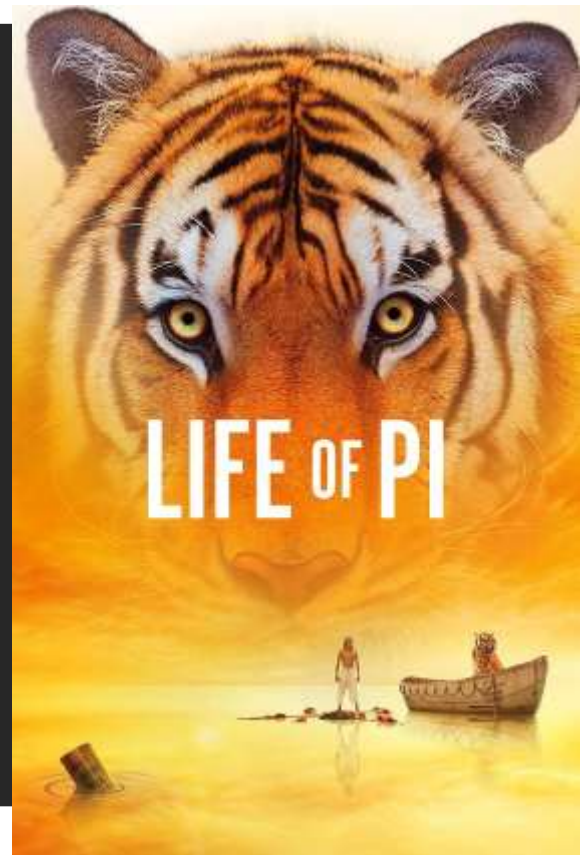
If you find that you are having a hard time comprehending the main ideas in each chapter, then use these questions to bolster your understanding. The following is a list of suggestions for use:

Preview the questions before you read: Use the questions to clue yourself in on what main ideas or events to be looking for while you read.

Quiz yourself after you read: After you read the chapter, see if you can answer each of the questions. If you can't, go back and look for the answer to strengthen your understanding of the chapter.

Take notes and reflect: You may also notice that some of the questions included in this packet will clue you in on important themes and symbols. Use the questions as a resource of ideas for your chapter annotations.

***REMEMBER...your personal responses to the text are most important. So, don't let these questions get in the way of your own creative thought and interpretation.**



Chapters 1–2

1. How does the three-toed sloth survive?
2. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to nonhumans. Find examples of anthropomorphism in chapter 1.
3. Describe some examples of imagery, figurative language in Chapter 1.
4. In Chapter 2, in italics, who is the narrator and who is the subject?

Chapters 3–5

5. Describe how Pi comes to be named after a French swimming pool.
6. Pondicherry Zoo, which once loomed so large in Pi's life, is now only a place of memory. Describe a childhood experience or place which has "shrunk" in your memory.
7. Pi does not agree with people who "think animals in the wild are 'happy' because they are 'free'" (15). Why?
8. Describe how and why Piscine Molitor Patel becomes "Pi".
9. Pi writes his name on the blackboard with every teacher during the day. He says that "repetition is important in the training not only of animals but also of humans" (23). Explain.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss Pi's statement that "I have nothing to say of my working life, only that a tie is a noose, and inverted though it is, it will hang a man nonetheless if he's not careful" (6).
2. How does the word "bamboozle" represent the India Martel and Pi describe?
3. How do you feel about zoos? Have your ideas about zoos changed? What is your favorite zoo animal?
4. Compare school or society to a zoo using the features Pi describes in Chapter 4.
5. Pi finds "refuge" in a Greek letter. Why are names so important to our sense of self?

Chapters 6–7

10. Pi's house is both overheated and overstocked. Any guesses as to why?
11. What is the difference between an atheist and an agnostic?
12. Describe Mr. Kumar.
13. Why is Mr. Kumar so important to Pi?
14. Why does Pi dislike agnostics more than atheists?

Chapter 8

15. How does Pi's father teach him that "an animal is an animal?"
16. How does Ravi, Pi's older brother, terrorize him after the tiger incident?

Chapters 9–14

17. Describe territoriality as it relates to Pi's father's zoo and to animals in general.
18. Martel's statement, "Memory is an ocean and he bobs on its surface" (42), is an allusion. What does it refer to? (Note: allusion is a passing or casual reference to a person, event, place, or phrase, either directly or implied.)
19. In Chapter 13, Pi notes: "Much hostile and aggressive behavior among animals is the expression of social insecurity" (43). An animal's social rank is central to how he leads his life (who he associates with, when he eats, etc.). To feel secure, an animal needs to know his place in the social hierarchy. Does this hold true for humans as well? Explain.
20. Who are the best performers in the circus and why?

Chapter 15

21. Describe Pi's house in a paragraph. What is most striking?
22. Compare the history, beliefs, scripture, and worship of Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism.

Chapters 16–20

23. In these chapters, Pi becomes a disciple of all three religions. For each, discuss his means of discovery, what he finds peculiar, why he feels a connection, and a favorite quote.

Chapters 21–22

24. What must the "better story" include, and what does a "dry, yeastless factuality" represent?
25. Chapter 22 has an important insight. What is it?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In Chapter 7, Mr. Kumar notes: "If we had politicians like these goats and rhinos we'd have fewer problems in our country" (27). Comment on this statement in the context of the novel and in the context of a current government.
2. Have we "made the entire planet our prey" (29) as Pi asserts in chapter 8? Elaborate, using specific examples to support your argument.
3. Pi notes in Chapter 10: "All living things contain a measure of madness that moves them in strange, sometimes inexplicable ways" (41). Comment on both the benefits and disadvantages of this tendency using specific examples.
4. In Chapter 16, Pi says: "A plague upon fundamentalists and literalists!" (49). Knowing that Pi juggles three religions, comment on this statement using knowledge, observation, or experience.

Chapters 23–28

26. Pi's allegiance to all three religions is brought into question. How does Pi triumph and make all three spiritual leaders appear petty and intolerant?
27. In Chapter 25, how does Pi challenge the hypocrisy of some "religious" people?

28. How do Piscine's parents resolve Pi's religious "zealotry"?

Chapter 29

29. Why do people move, according to Pi?

30. What finally prompts Pi's father to leave India?

31. What clever word play does Martel employ on Page 78 to illustrate Mr. Patel's discontent?

Chapters 30–31

32. Why does Martel seem surprised by Pi's nuclear family?

33. How do the two Mr. Kumars react to the animals at the zoo?

Chapters 32–33

34. Explain Pi's rationale for zoomorphism, "where an animal takes a human being, or another animal, to be one of its kind" (84).

35. What do you take away from Chapter 33's photographic mementos?

Chapters 34–36

36. What is amazing to Pi about the selling of the zoo animals?

37. How do Pi and his brother, Ravi, feel about moving from India to Canada?

38. Anticipate what the last sentence of Part One, "This story has a happy ending" (93) might mean.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. "People move in the hope of a better life" (77). Discuss this theory in the context of other novels you've read, direct experience, or observation.
2. Pi notes, "The Greater Good and the Greater Profit are not compatible aims, much to Father's chagrin" (78). Discuss this observation in the context of the Pondicherry Zoo and in the context of modern society, giving specific examples to support your arguments.
3. Pay says, "Bad politics is bad for business" (79). Discuss.

Chapter 37

39. How would you describe Pi's state of mind in this chapter? Give evidence from the text.

40. How does Pi prove to be "the next goat"?

Chapters 38-47

41. Describe the ecosystem on the lifeboat.

42. What great loss does Pi many times lament?

43. What important item does Pi manage to save for future use? How might this prove useful?

44. These are difficult chapters to read due to the graphic detail of the carnage. What do you find most horrific? What does Pi seem most upset about?

45. Who or what might the zebra represent?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How might the animals aboard Pi's lifeboat be metaphors for people in Pi's life? Or, give the attributes of the animals on the lifeboat and compare them to people or types of people in the world.
2. Discuss the significance of Pi's statement: "Had I considered my prospects in the light of reason, I surely would have given up and let go of the oar, hoping that I might drown before being eaten. But I don't recall that I had a single thought during those first minutes of relative safety. I didn't even notice daybreak. I held on to the oar, I just held on, God only knows why" (107).

Chapters 48–49

46. How did Richard Parker get his name?
47. Pi says, “You might think I lost all hope at that point. I did. And as a result I perked up and felt much better” (134). How does this ironic statement make sense? (Note: irony is an incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs.)
48. Why is Pi unable to think logically at this point?
49. What might account for Richard Parker’s passivity?

Chapters 50–51

50. Draw or describe the lifeboat and the location of its inhabitants in Chapter 50.
51. Pi notes that “necessity is the mother of invention” (139). How does this prove to be the case?
52. What is one detail Pi notes that could save his life?
53. Give one example of imagery, figurative language in Chapter 51 that expresses Pi’s enjoyment of his first taste of water in three days.
54. Why is “animal fat” italicized in Pi’s description of the fortified biscuits’ ingredients?
55. How does Pi show both resourcefulness and joy in his find?

Chapters 52–53

56. Chapter 52 is largely a list. How does this abrupt change in Martel’s writing style affect the reader?
57. What instincts for survival does Pi exhibit in Chapter 53?
58. “I felt like a prisoner being pushed off a plank by pirates” (154). Explain.

Chapters 54–55

59. During Pi’s long, sleepless, rain-soaked night, he devises several plans for defeating Richard Parker. Which of these does he ultimately decide upon? Which would you choose?
60. In the daylight, Pi thinks better of “Plan Number Six.” Why?

Chapters 56–57

61. Why does Pi think fear is “life’s only true opponent”?
62. How is fear personified in Chapter 56?
63. How does Richard Parker himself calm Pi down?
64. What is Pi’s epiphany?
65. Pi says, “But there’s more to it. I will come clean. I will tell you a secret: a part of me was glad about Richard Parker. A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger” (164). How might Pi’s new plan to keep Richard Parker alive assist him spiritually, physically, and intellectually?

Chapter 58

66. Name one possibly life-saving and one humorous survival tip from
67. the survival manual Pi finds.
68. Explain Pi’s statement that “a castaway’s worst mistake is to hope too much and do too little.”

Question for Essay and Discussion

1. Compare Pi’s description of Richard Parker on pp. 151–52 with William Blake’s poem “The Tyger.” What tone do both Martel and Blake employ in their descriptions? How do they feel about their subjects? Find other animal/nature novels, poetry, short stories for comparison/contrast purposes.

The Tyger
by William Blake

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And watered heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Chapters 59–70

69. These chapters deal with Pi's survival. In chapter 59, how does Pi make the tarpaulin his?
70. How else does Pi improve his odds at survival?
71. How long does Pi survive as a castaway in the Pacific and why is this a significant number?
72. In Chapter 68, why does Pi say he has difficulty sleeping?
73. Why does Richard Parker not attack Pi during this time?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How and why has Pi changed from a peace-loving vegetarian to a blood-thirsty carnivore who wrestles sea turtles?
2. "Life is a peephole, a single tiny entry onto a vastness—how can I not dwell on this brief, cramped view I have of things? This peephole is all I've got!" (177). Explain Pi's peephole and contrast it with yours. How does one's "peephole" influence one's view of the world?
3. "Time is an illusion that only makes us pant" (192) Comment on how Pi's survival depends on his ability to forget time. How are we all prisoners of time?

Chapters 71–75

74. How does Pi set about training Richard Parker?
75. How does Pi manage to keep his faith in God despite unremitting hardships?

Chapters 76–84

76. What are some signs of Pi's physical and spiritual deterioration?
77. The storm in chapter 83 causes much loss. What remains to keep Pi from certain death?
78. How does Pi regard birds and mammals that are not prey?

Chapters 85–86

79. "I remember that close encounter with electrocution and third-degree burns as one of the few times during my ordeal when I felt genuine happiness" (233). How can this be?
80. "At moments of wonder, it is easy to avoid small thinking, to entertain thoughts that span the universe, that capture both thunder and tinkle, thick and thin, the near and the far" (233). Comment on Pi's use of opposites here. Have you ever felt similarly?
81. In Chapter 86, Pi's hopes are dashed when a massive ship bears down on them without ever seeing them. How does he recover from such a crushing blow?

Chapters 87–91

82. These chapters represent extreme anguish for Pi. Describe some of the worst things to befall Pi during this section.
83. In Chapter 90, Pi has a hallucinatory conversation between a carnivorous sailor who tries to strangle him, and himself, a peace-loving vegetarian. What is the purpose of this chapter?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. "To be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle... The circumference is ever great" (215–16). Comment on this geometric observation from Pi's viewpoint and from your own.
2. Reread the last paragraph of Chapter 78. Write about some of the highs and lows that Pi experiences as a castaway.

Chapter 92–93

84. We know from the outset that the island is empirically impossible. Why then do we believe it as readers?
85. The island seems to be entirely vegetarian. Why?
86. Like most things too good to be true, the island is, too. How does it show its true colors?
87. What might the island and its true nature symbolize?
88. "Nothing distracted the meerkats from their little lives of pond staring and algae nibbling" (269). Is Pi talking about meerkats or human nature in this passage?
89. As Pi begins to rejuvenate on the island, so, too, does Richard Parker. Why?

Chapter 94

90. After more than seven months, Pi reaches land. Richard Parker disappears into the forest immediately. Why no goodbyes?
91. Pi says, "It's important in life to conclude things properly. Only then can you let go" (p. 285). Discuss the truth of these words.

Chapters 95–98

92. How is the trip of Mr. Tomohiro Okamoto and Mr. Atsuro Chiba of the Japanese Ministry of Transport to visit Pi in the hospital a "comedy of errors"?

93. In many ways, these chapters are the most humorous part of the novel. On what premise does this humor rely?
94. Why is Chapter 97 only two words?

Chapters 99–100

95. What do the floating bananas and the cultivated bonsai trees illustrate?
96. How does the bonsai tree story remind the reader of the two Mr. Kumars?
97. What is the significance of Mr. Okamoto saying, “The cook on the Tsimtsum was a Frenchman” (299).
98. Pi tells the “real” story at last. Why do Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba ultimately report Pi’s original story—with animals—instead?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Pi says, “I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order. Where we can, we must give things a meaningful shape” (285). How important are form and structure to people’s happiness?
2. Pi says to Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, “If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? Isn’t love hard to believe?” (297). Discuss this in the context of faith and storytelling.
3. Discuss the idea that Richard Parker is part of Pi and necessary for his survival on the lifeboat.