

## **LIFE OF PI: COMPARING BOOK TO FILM**

For director Ang Lee, bringing *Life of Pi* to the big screen was an epic challenge. Read the following article excerpt. Then, complete the assignment that follows (see back).

*"Life of Pi Took Ang Lee on an Epic Journey of his Own" by Bryan Alexander  
USA Today, November 21, 2012*

*Life of Pi* [was] a four-year epic journey for Lee, 58, who struggled to bring Yann Martel's 2002 Man Booker Prize-winning novel to the screen. The story of a young Indian boy exploring his spirituality before heading out on an ill-fated journey with his family and a menagerie of animals across the Pacific was long considered unfilmable — especially because a storm leaves Pi alone on the raft with the tiger for much of the story.



But the Oscar-winning Lee (best director for 2005's *Brokeback Mountain* and best foreign film for 2000's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) persevered just as surely as Pi eventually finds land.

"I feel exactly how Pi was when he finally reached the Mexican shore," Lee says, explaining the feeling of completing the project. "I literally felt like I was adrift with the tiger."

Lee initially declined directing the project despite being an admirer of the "mind-boggling" novel.

"For what it was, it was way too expensive to make, if it was filmable at all. Everything put together, it was like the number pi, irrational. If you know the business, there were a lot of no-nos."

The filmmaker also was bolstered by advances in computer graphic technology to capture the film's animals, especially the Bengal tiger, called Richard Parker. Even with the technology, it was painstaking work.

"It's still handcraft. There's no button to push. There's not a program to make an animal look real," Lee says. "Every frame is a labor of love. Some shots took three months, some six months."

To help the process, the filmmakers brought four tigers and one hyena to the set to study and shot weeks' worth of reference shots for their computer images. A 7-year-old

450-pound Bengal tiger named King became the model for Richard Parker.

Visual effects supervisor Bill Westenhoffer says the tiger, which took a year to create, was so real that the filmmakers had to prove to the government of India that it was computer-generated.

"We had to show the tiger getting unhealthy was all our doing," Westenhoffer says. "They wanted to know no tiger was harmed. It was actually a compliment."

For the water shots, Lee oversaw the production of the largest self-generating wave tank ever designed and built for a movie. Built on the site of a former airport in his hometown of Taichung, Taiwan, the tank had a capacity of 1.7 million gallons.

Even with the controlled environment, the shots were challenging. During a sequence called "Storm of God," Lee had one of the most frustrating days of his movie career as the 3-D equipment became fogged up late into a night shoot.

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~Director Ang Lee

Pi cries out to God in the scene, and Lee jokes that he was going through the same feelings.

'You look up at God and say: 'How does this work? Show me!' Give me a sign or something," Lee says, looking to the ceiling of his office. "I did this. I did that. What more do you want?' I think everyone has those moments in their lives."

One of the crowning moments is the sinking of the cargo ship that starts Pi's journey. All told, the storm-filled scene took nearly 77 days to shoot.

"It's hard to convince the studio when they haven't seen it. Why do we spend so much time sinking the boat? But that's a pure cinematic experience. I am very proud of it," he says with a satisfied smile.

As you view Lee's adaptation of Martel's novel, complete the chart below.

<p><b>CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:</b> How were they described in the book? Do the characters look the way you expected to? Explain.</p>	
<p><b>ADDITIONS:</b> What did the director add to the movie that isn't in the book? What does the addition accomplish? Is it necessary? Explain.</p>	
<p><b>DELETIONS:</b> What scenes or specific details does the movie leave out? Why do you think the deletions were made? How does the change impact the tale?</p>	
<p><b>RELATIONSHIPS:</b> How does each genre portray the relationships between the characters? Is the movie accurate in the portrayal? Explain.</p>	
<p><b>THEME:</b> What themes are present in each? Which is portrayed the strongest? Why?</p>	