



## Quest 1 Life of Pi Summer Reading Essays

If you haven't heard of Yann Martel's novel, *Life of Pi*, you aren't a member of the class of 2008. Over the summer the freshmen were required to read *Life of Pi* for their SAGE Quest 1 class. They were also supposed to write an essay reacting to the novel. The Quest 1 Student Teaching Assistants got together and decided that these four were among the very best.

Chris Witt

After I read the assigned book "*Life of Pi*" I was left confused about what really happened in the story. I know the tale told is just that, a tale. It's the long adventure of a boy who was a sole survivor of a shipwreck with the exception of a few zoo animals, who all end up on the same lifeboat. The story tells the conflicts that take place both internal and external. The part that left me wondering was at the very end of the book, with less than five chapters remaining, when the investigators from Tokyo don't believe Pi's story of survival. Pi then tells another story of his survival without the animals. This is what confused me. Which of the two stories am I to believe is the true story of his survival? Was he the tiger, Richard Parker, in his first story or was the tiger an imaginary creature to keep his mind at ease while at sea?

Like in religion you are given several stories written by people from that time. There is no one left to question what really happened. So you are left with the decision of what you think is the true story. So in many ways storytelling and religion are much alike. I am left pondering on the true story of what happened in this book.

In the book the aspects of Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam are discussed when the priests come to visit Pi. Each, of course, had their own opinion of which religion told the truth of what happened in the past. Like people who are not brought up in a religious home and are looking to find a religion, these people must decide for themselves which story they should accept as the true one. At the end of this book I was left in a similar state. I was left trying to decide which story I should perceive as being the one that told the events as they happened. After much consideration I decided for myself that the story that Pi told throughout the book was one he used to sooth his state of mind to help minimize the level of stress that he already had. I believe that the story of events that he last gave to the investigators from Tokyo, the one with actual people rather than animals, to be the events that took place following the sinking

of the *Tismtsum*. But like Pi I also keep an open mind. Pi decided that all three of his religions were tied together through their stories. They all started similarly and no matter what happens they will end the same. Pi's stories of survival are in this way similar to his beliefs- they both start the same way and they both end the same way. E

This story has given me more of an open mind towards other religions. It showed me that storytelling and religion are tied together in many forms. Open minds are necessary in both.

Kellie Milam

*Life of Pi*, written by Yann Martel, is a fictional novel that tells the story of a teenage boy and his journey through not only the vast Pacific Ocean, but also through religion, zoology, and his own maturity. Martel's creative storytelling introduces different religions to the reader making them easy to understand as well as making them relative to today's society.

A story is interesting for one reason and one reason only; the reader must be able to relate in some way to the given topic. This theory goes the same for religion; without storytelling in religious practices, followers would not be as inclined to strictly obey their rules, as they do without stories of profits and angels to lead by example. Stories make religion relatable. A prime example as to the testing of this theory comes near the end of Martel's story. When the Japanese transport investigators first hear Pi's story which included the animals, both men were skeptical; however, when Pi changed the animals into humans, the story became more realistic which in turn made the men into believers. Religious followers often question their rituals and beliefs, but when able to understand and comprehend just what those rituals and beliefs actually represent one can find it easier to obey—just as the Japanese investigators were able to make the connection.

Religion and storytelling go hand in hand; however, for one to say that religion is a form of storytelling would be incorrect. Storytelling is an aid to all religions. The Bible, Qur'an, and other holy books are not forms of entertainment, but tools that each religion uses to relate their beliefs.

Martel has written a character, Pi, who is young, open-minded, and has the gift to have ideas about religion. When all three religious figures from each of the religions that Pi is practicing confront Pi's parents, the situation becomes an all out battle for Pi. He is forced to defend his thoughts

and actions about these three religions, when in all actuality all religions basically boil down to a few major beliefs. What makes Pi unique is that instead of simply believing, he has the gift to explore different ideas and thoughts as to what those particular beliefs truly mean, and that is something that everyone else in the novel cannot comprehend.

All writing and storytelling has a purpose, but it is difficult for one to think that Dr. Seuss intended *The Cat in the Hat* to be anything more than simply fun reading for children. These same thoughts go into the idea of their not being a theological dimension to all storytelling—not every book or oral story was created to get across a deep and powerful meaning. *Life of Pi* is a thought-provoking novel that helps the reader to identify with struggle that the main character is facing, while at the same time relaying an underlying theme—coping with the bad, while embracing life's little victories, as Pi matured, so did the reader.

Mason Tate

"In the beginning, there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1, New Oxford Annotated Bible)

This quote from the Bible is a clear illustration of the correlation between verbal and spiritual consciousness. The stories and parables of various religions were told over and over, generation after generation, until they were codified. This multi-generational handing down of stories is symbolized in *Life of Pi* through Pi's multiple accounts of his journey—first to the Mexican authorities and then to the speaker in the novel.

The author indicates that he is "hungry," and leads the reader to infer that the hunger is spiritual. He meets an elderly man who insists that Pi's story will, "...make you believe in God." (X) And isn't that just what stories and parables do? Illustrate moral dilemmas, illuminate moral truths and demonstrate good decision making, all while entertaining and engaging the listener? While God often appears as a metaphorical character in these stories, the point of them is to place the active players in situations in which they have the opportunity to be Christ-like.

An example of Pi's opportunity to be Christ-like is his choice of implementing "Plan Number Seven: Keep Him Alive" in reference to how he should handle the escalating situation with Richard Parker. Given the choice between killing the tiger, waging a war of attrition against him and keeping him alive, Pi chooses the most

Godly option. This obviously proves fruitful for them both: Richard Parker is allowed to survive until he finally reaches shore, and Pi has something to live for. Keeping Richard Parker alive is symbolic of Pi's own survival; his drive to keep something from dying gives him hope that he can do the same for himself. Godliness triumphs in yet another parable.

Often, animals are used in parables to appeal to children and to make the stories more lively and entertaining. In *Life of Pi*, the story is told using animals to represent the human characters in the more realistic account of the journey. Pi's inability to accept man's inherent evil comes from his deep religious piety and from the simple fact that he was raised in a zoo. Animals are what he knows, and thus he relates his tale to animals to make it more bearable for himself. Pi knows that animals only kill from instinct

and necessity so it makes more sense to him for a hyena to kill a zebra for food than a Frenchman to kill his mother from madness.

In conclusion, *Life of Pi* is a phenomenal example of how religion springs from the human interaction inherent in storytelling. Pi tells his story as a parable of how we struggle to maintain a balance between ourselves and our known--and unknown--environments. In telling and retelling the story of his monumental quest for survival and salvation, Pi illustrates the human need for stories to make us, "believe in God".

Erika Bennett

An acclaimed educator, Mary McLeod Bethune was once quoted as saying, "Without faith, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible." This is a common theme in the novel *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, where the two aspects of religion and storytelling are called upon. Martel ties the two together through use of religious allusions and presents them both with the theme of Faith.

Storytelling and religion's relationship is made apparent by the continuous question of faith. A young 16-year old Pi finds himself captivated by three religions, Christianity, Hinduism, and Muslim. Martel weaves several religious allusions into his novel during Pi's time spent stranded in a lifeboat. This allows Pi to constantly look to his religious teachings for justification. He finds strength in comparing his struggles to the stories that these religions teachings are based off of. This comparison helps Pi to support his Faith and strengthen it. Towards the end of the novel, When Pi tells his two stories to the men from