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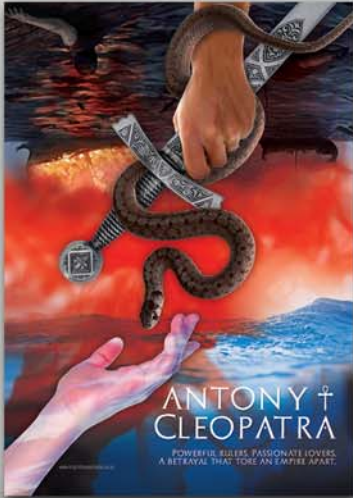
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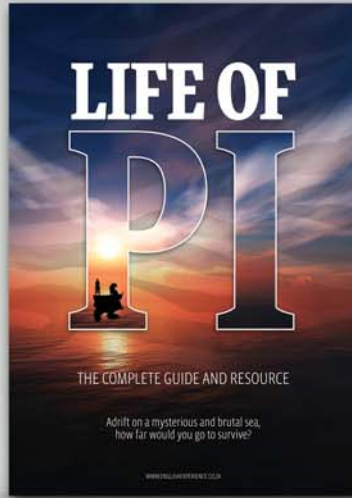
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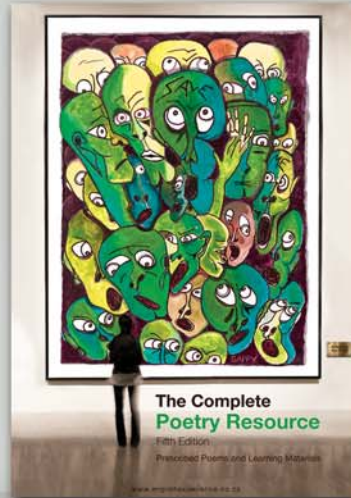
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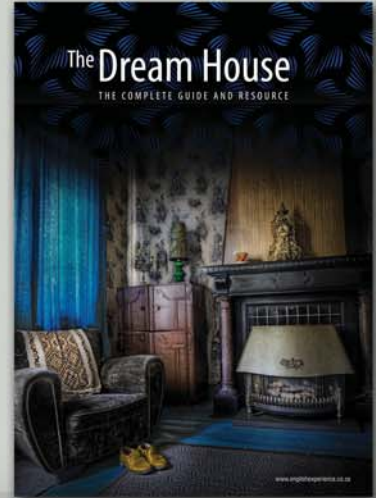
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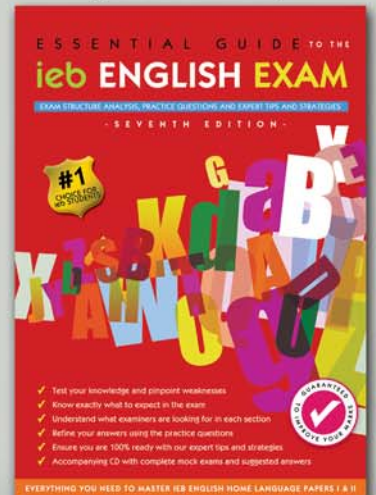
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Life of Pi

COMPLETE GUIDE AND RESOURCE

PUBLISHED AND EDITED BY: THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

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All references made to the novel in this resource and the companion disc,
refer to the Canongate Books edition of the novel (ISBN 978-1-78211-869-5)

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Foreword

About The English Experience

The English Experience is an independent South African publishing house that specialises in developing high-quality English and Life Orientation educational resources for IEB educators and students. The team of passionate, talented experts behind The English Experience works tirelessly to ensure that every resource encourages insight, growth and debate — enriching and challenging both educators and students — without losing sight of the important goal of academic success and examination readiness.

Focused on bringing the subject to life, every resource The English Experience publishes incorporates a range of features — including content and contextual questions and stimulating enrichment materials — designed to encourage a critical appreciation of the subject and to inspire the higher-order thinking for which examiners are always looking.

The world-class English Experience team includes highly experienced educators, some with over 20 years of classroom experience, passionate literary experts in various fields like South African fiction, poetry and Shakespeare, fanatical historians and researchers, creative writers, skilled editors, pernickety proofreaders and obsessive fact checkers — together with spirited university lecturers and enthusiastic young minds who help ensure our approach remains unique and fresh.

While academic success is a non-negotiable consideration, our aspiration is to inspire a genuine interest in, and love of, English literature.

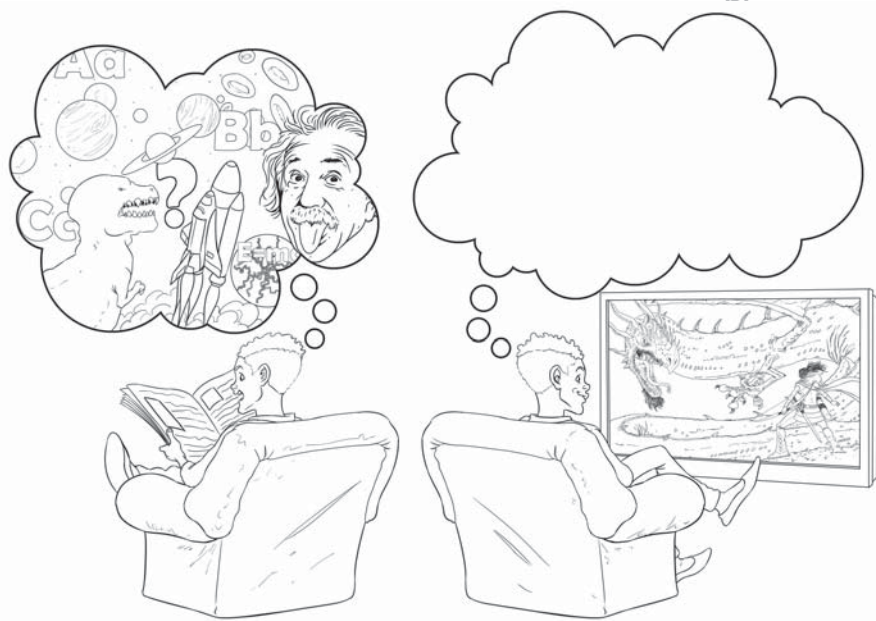


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Our approach

Perhaps the toughest challenge with teaching literature to modern students is convincing them that the extra effort required in reading a novel — compared with the passive immediacy of movies and TV shows — is worth it. Decoding the language and bringing the text to life in the imagination can be taxing for young adults so it's perhaps not surprising that many of them see novels as works through which they must slog to earn marks or pass a test.

This resource has been written with this reality in mind. Even though the language, themes and settings of the novel are likely to be easily accessible to students in Grades 10 and 11, particular attention has been paid to providing the kind of context and insight necessary to help them empathise fully with the characters and their struggles.

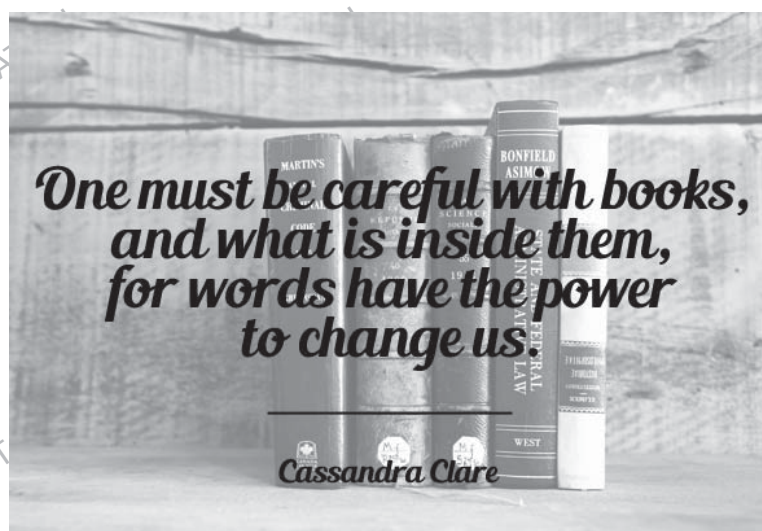


Reading a written description of a person, event or place encourages us to use our imaginations as we picture everything in our minds, unlike watching a movie or TV show, which creates these images for us on the screen. Ultimately, we are only limited by what we can imagine.

We passionately believe that studying literature rewards us with a broader, deeper understanding of ourselves and those around us. That is why this resource does more than provide students with a comprehensive, detailed analysis of the text. It also encourages them to engage with the work on a personal level and to uncover their own responses through the extensive chapter-specific questions, enrichment tasks and essay topics.

Throughout the resource, students are challenged to agree or disagree with both the characters and events in the novel and the analysis provided. By formulating and expressing their own responses to the opinions, ideas and themes explored in each novel, students are encouraged to reflect and grow as individuals as well as learners.

In the end, we have approached the specific needs of students in Grades 10 and 11 with two, interrelated goals in mind. Our first objective is to ensure that students are thoroughly prepared to tackle the increasing demands of the English syllabus throughout the rest of their school careers and, ultimately, to ensure examination readiness and academic success. Our second ambition is to inspire a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, the work being studied.



Using this resource

This imaginative, comprehensive resource has been specifically designed to bring the novel to life and make studying the text with students in Grades 10 and 11 a fun, exhilarating and inspiring experience. It includes: an extensive introduction to the novel and the author; detailed summaries; rich literary analyses; diverse, chapter-specific short questions; challenging essay questions; and stimulating enrichment tasks. In short, this resource contains everything needed to study the novel intensively and enliven the text.

Background to the novel

We recommend working through the 'Background to the novel' section first so that students become familiar with the author and the context of the novel — its plot and characters, its historical setting and the central themes it explores.

While much of the story takes place on the Pacific Ocean, the protagonist, Pi, is shaped by his childhood and experiences growing up in India in the 1970s. As a result, a brief knowledge of the historical, political and social complexities of Indian society at that time will help students understand his perspectives and motivations.

Likewise, Pi draws heavily on his religious beliefs during his ordeal and so a brief introduction to the three religions he practises is included in this section.

The 'Introduction to the novel' segment completes this section, providing students with an initial overview and appreciation of the plot, characters and themes of the work, before they engage with the text itself.

By working through this comprehensive introductory section first, students will be prepared, engaged and able to read the novel with the right mindset.

Critical commentary

Once students have been prepared and have read through the novel, the chapter-by-chapter summaries and analyses provided in the critical commentary section ensure that a solid foundation of knowledge is laid.

Each chapter is summarised and analysed separately. Extensive glossaries are included, and students are required to engage with the content directly through chapter-specific questions.



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Students can then methodically build on this foundation, only dealing with the whole novel once they have worked through it step by step.

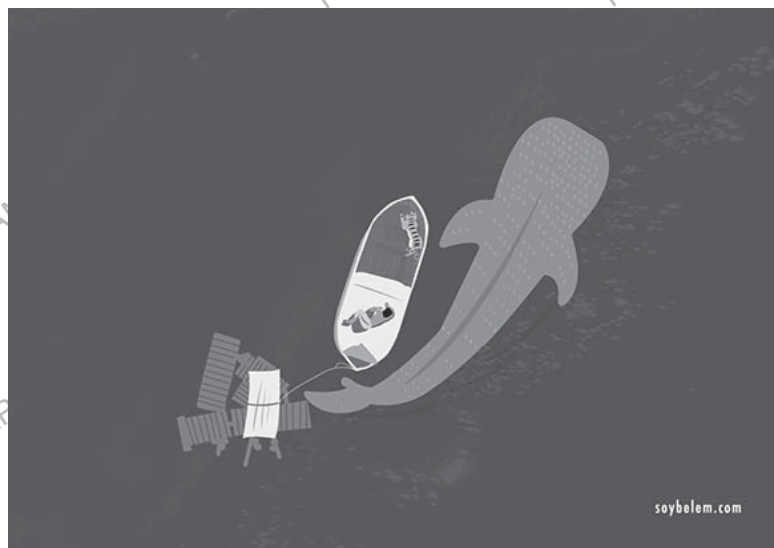
At the end of the summaries, there is also a series of enrichment tasks and a wide selection of rigorous essay topics, ensuring that students also tackle the novel in its entirety.

Literary analysis

The 'Literary analysis' section includes analyses of the plot, narration and structure, characters, themes, motifs and symbols. It also highlights key quotations from the novel, with suggested explanations.

Literary essay

To ensure examination readiness and success, the resource also features an extensive section on the 'Literary essay'. This section provides guidelines on writing literary essays, two annotated examples from which to learn, and a selection of essay topics. It also includes suggested further reading, a useful revision reading quiz and suggestions on how to prepare for an examination.



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We hope you enjoy using this resource as much as we enjoyed putting it together. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Key to using the boxes in this resource:



Definition / Glossary

Provides the meanings of words and terms used in the text



Quirky Fact

Fun, interesting extraneous information



Information

Provides additional details or facts about a topic



Checklist

A list of items or activities required to complete a task satisfactorily



Alert

Something to which you need to pay attention



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Background to the novel

Author background

In *Life of Pi*, author Yann Martel has created a vivid, enthralling tale of high adventure and the will to survive against seemingly insurmountable odds. Martel's novel seamlessly combines a compelling coming-of-age story with a fascinating experience of magical realism, and explores some of life's most enduring spiritual questions. In this section, we present a short biography of the author and an interview with him in which he shares with us what inspired him to write the novel, the issues he wished to explore in the text and what he hopes students might gain from reading it.

Author biography



By all accounts, Yann Martel lives a simple life. 'I don't want to live in New York, London and Paris and be the writer with a capital W,' he commented in a 2016 interview with Paul Laity. Despite the phenomenal success of *Life of Pi* and the global attention that it has brought him, Martel's home life and his four young children, in particular, keep him grounded. 'They are not impressed that I won the Booker prize,' he explains. 'They aren't impressed that I wrote *Life of Pi*.'

Though his children may not hold his achievements in high regard, Martel's career has been a remarkable one. Born in Spain in 1963, Martel and his family moved frequently when he was a child, finally settling in Canada, after stints in Mexico, Costa Rica, Portugal and Alaska. Exploration was in his blood, however, and, as an adult, he travelled through France, South America, Iran, Turkey and India, while working odd jobs as a parking attendant and dishwasher.

I write to understand issues that are important to me, to express my creative energies and to pass the time in a meaningful way.

You must take life the way it comes at you and make the best of it.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Martel garnered some attention as a short story writer, netting a slew of awards. Despite this, his first attempt at novel writing was not met with much praise. Titled *Self* and published in 1996, the novel was highly experimental and, many critics found, inaccessible. Its sales were far from impressive, and Martel himself admitted that it 'is a terrible novel,' and that he 'wishes it would disappear.'

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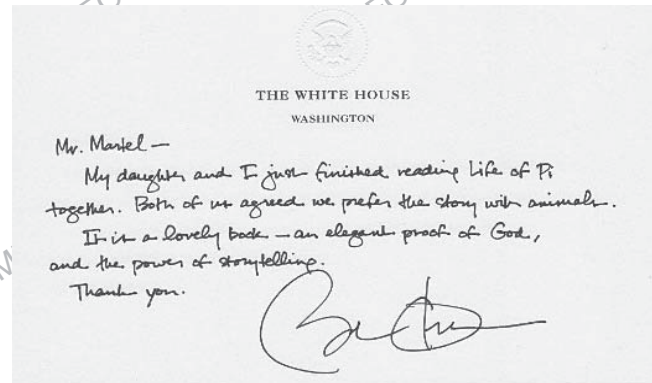
© Uwe Portillo

It was only in 2001, with the publication of *Life of Pi*, that Martel found true literary success. The novel has been called 'a surprise success story' around the world. It has been translated into dozens of languages and has sold more than 12 million copies worldwide. The novel did not have an easy path to success, however; the manuscript was rejected by at least five publishers before being picked up by the Canadian publishers Alfred A. Knopf.

In 2002, *Life of Pi* was honoured with its most prestigious literary award when it was announced as the recipient of the *Man Booker Prize for Fiction*. The judges praised the novel, saying that '[i]n *Life of Pi* we have chosen an audacious book in which inventiveness explores belief.' Martel commented at the time that it felt like 'winning the lottery'.

Even former US President Barack Obama added his praise, sending Martel a personally written note upon completing the novel (*pictured right*). Obama thanked Martel for his 'lovely book', saying that he read it with his daughter and that both of them 'prefer[red] the story with animals'.

Since the success of *Life of Pi*, Martel has taught at various academic institutions and collaborated with other artists and writers. His third novel, *Beatrice and Virgil*, was well received by readers and critics alike in 2010 and was followed in 2016 by *The High Mountains of Portugal*.



© Yann Martel (Lettersofnote.com)



The 'impossible to film novel'

A screen adaptation of *Life of Pi* was already in the works soon after its publication. It took several years for the project to get off the ground, however. Several directors – including M. Night Shyamalan and Alfonso Cuarón – were attached to the film during the course of its development, but dropped out at various stages. For a long time, Martel's lush maritime story of suffering and survival was thought to be impossible to translate to the screen.

Eventually, in 2009, director Ang Lee was signed on, but the project suffered another delay when the studio balked at the massive US\$120 million budget needed for the film. When the production was eventually approved, Lee began the months-long search for the perfect actor to portray Pi, eventually casting newcomer Suraj Sharma in the role. Sharma never intended to audition, but, rather, went along to support his brother — and ended up beating more than 3,000 other hopefuls for the role.

Life of Pi proved to be a sumptuous and ambitious project that was released in cinemas in 3D in November 2012. The film was universally acclaimed by critics and earned a whopping US\$609 million at the box office. It went on to be nominated for eleven Academy Awards, winning four, including *Best Director* for Lee, *Best Cinematography*, *Best Original Score* and *Best Visual Effects*.

Author interview

'Life is about perfecting the art of believing as much as possible'

English Experience: What prompted you to write the novel?

Yann Martel: Many things. A trip to India. An interest in looking at religion. Encounters with animals. The urge to understand. The desire to tell a story.

EE: What were the main themes you set out to address in the work?

YM: I was interested in exploring the idea that life is an interpretation, that facts are the ground upon which we build our lives, not the building itself. We cannot ignore facts, but neither should we be reduced by them or to them.

In examining religion in *Life of Pi*, I was looking at belief systems that excel at taking a few facts (the life of a long-ago rabble-rousing Jew, for example) and constructing entire world-views from them.

Much of religion is unverifiable. To take the example of Christianity, there is little doubt that a man named Jesus really did live about two thousand years ago in Palestine, but what is very much open to question is what to make of Jesus. The truth of the divine aspect of his life can't be corroborated in any reasonable way. It can only be corroborated in an *imaginative* way through faith. (The same goes for every other religion or, indeed, for any belief system that requires faith.) Faith is an interpretation. It is a way of seeing.

EE: Why did you choose this subject matter for your novel?

YM: I happened to be in India, backpacking. I meant to work on a novel set in Portugal, but, as I explain in the Author's Note of *Life of Pi*, the novel didn't come alive and I put it aside. I had no particular reason to be in India anymore. So, what did I do? I opened my eyes. And what did I see? I saw religion.

There are a lot of religions in India. Hinduism, of course, but also Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Animism, and so on. They are on show everywhere, not only as buildings — temples, shrines, churches — but also in great festivals and pilgrimages that involve thousands upon thousands of people. And, for the first time in my life, I reacted to these manifestations of religion in a way that did not confirm my prejudices.

I should explain that I grew up in an entirely secular family from the most secular province of Canada. Until that visit to India, I held religion in disdain. I knew just enough about religion to dislike it. Religion seemed to me to be an excuse for hating women, gay people, Jewish people and anyone else who was different, based on nonsense myths from long ago. It seemed to me to be an insult to common sense.



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In India, I didn't have my usual gut reaction to religion because I was seeing it in a foreign context. I watched people praying and I wandered through great temple complexes, without seeking to condemn. I suddenly realised that there was another aspect to the religious experience that I had never seen or understood and, out of this moment of openness and curiosity, I wrote *Life of Pi*.

This is, sadly, not to say that religion isn't afflicted with people who are, indeed, misogynists, anti-Semites and so on, but that these people aren't the whole picture.

EE: How did you decide on the title for the novel?

YM: *Life of Pi* was just the working title, but it stuck. The one thing I thought about was whether to put 'The' at the start. *Life of Pi* is about openness and choice, though, so a definite article didn't seem right. A *Life of Pi* would be more open, but it sounded funny. Finally, I decided to have no article at all.

EE: How do you imagine South African students will respond to *Life of Pi*?

YM: I imagine that readers in South Africa will bring what readers everywhere bring to a book: that mix of openness and suspicion that characterises each of us. Some will be won over by the book, others not.

EE: Do you think teenage South African students will be able to relate to Pi and his experiences?

YM: I hope so. Religion is present in South Africa, as are animals, and South African teenagers, like teenagers — and, indeed, everyone — everywhere, have questions about life: the meaning of it, what to make of it, their place in it. *Life of Pi* is about two stories that can be mapped onto the facts of Pi Patel's life. Everyone must do the same thing: find stories that fit the facts of their life.

Life of Pi is about two stories that can be mapped onto the facts of Pi Patel's life. Everyone must do the same thing: find stories that fit the facts of their life.

EE: Could you describe your inspiration behind the complex character of Pi?

YM: I built him one brick at a time. He is a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian. That is three bricks. He grows up in a zoo. That is another brick. He has a family. He is curious and open-minded — more bricks. Soon enough, he was built and came to life.

EE: How do you believe Pi's coming-of-age journey impacts on his psyche?

YM: I think it shatters his psyche, at first, but that his inner self comes back together even more strongly because Pi has the tools to survive his ordeal. Pi shows strength of character, but I think there will always be an element of sadness within him as a consequence of what he lived through. You can't eliminate scars. You can only learn to live with them.

EE: How do you think the relationship between Pi and Richard Parker evolves throughout the course of the novel?

YM: I think it is a relationship based on mutual need — and compassion, on Pi's part — framed by a very clear knowledge of borders.

EE: What do you think Richard Parker symbolises for Pi, ultimately?

YM: The key to his survival. Without Richard Parker, Pi wouldn't have survived. Perhaps the more interesting question is what does Richard Parker symbolise for the reader? And that is something for the reader to work out for his or herself.

EE: What do you believe the novel suggests about the relationship between spirituality and the will to survive?

YM: Spirituality lends another dimension to survival.

Someone who is a pure materialist, who believes that all life and consciousness is the result of chance chemistry, sees death as a final and complete end. Pure blackness. Someone who is religious sees death differently. Death is a threshold that must be crossed. It is, no doubt, distressing and often painful, but it is a crossing into something else, a new state. Religion, therefore, extends life to include death: one never really dies, one only changes one's way of being. The fear of death is, thus, lessened.

Now, it is not easy being religious. It requires a *deep* imaginative sense, one that transforms reality. That imaginative sense usually comes only when it is needed. When you are young and immortal, who needs religion? It is when death starts knocking on the door of your mortality that you might start thinking differently.

EE: What point do you think the novel makes about storytelling and the nature of truth?

YM: That truth is not just a matter of facts. That stories aren't just whimsical make-believe. That faith is not a passive state, but requires an active use of one's imagination. It is in the careful blending of reality and imagination that we plumb the full depths of life.

EE: What do you think the algae island symbolises for Pi?

YM: I wanted the algae island to float just beyond what a reader could reasonably believe. Until that point, the reader has believed in Pi's survival and the tiger and, now, I push him or her even further.

If you are going to believe Pi's first story, the story with animals, I want you to have to stop being entirely reasonable and make a leap of faith and believe his account of the island — *and be the better for it*.

Life is about perfecting the art of believing as much as possible because what triumph is there, at the end of a life, in having believed as little as possible?



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Life is about perfecting the art of believing as much as possible because what triumph is there, at the end of a life, in having believed as little as possible?

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EE: Do you think Pi's spirituality plays a role in his appreciation and awe of the natural world that he experiences from the boat?

YM: Religion is all about awe and wonder so, yes, I think Pi's spirituality adds colour to the world around him. It makes a tiger, a whale, a shark more than just a biological being.

EE: Do you believe Pi reconciles his religious faith with his scientific beliefs?

YM: There has developed in Christianity this misconception that science and religion are antithetical. Islam has no problems with science. Science started in Islam because Muslims were curious about God's creation. If God created the world, studying the world became a religious act. So, whatever was discovered in the world never put God in question for Muslim scientists, it only opened up the marvels of God's creation more.

EE: What advice would you give students to help them understand the work?

YM: Don't worry about getting it 'right' or 'wrong'. There is no 'right' answer. There is no 'wrong' answer. There is only what you think and feel. Trust your sense. And read the book, of course.

EE: If students were to take only one single-minded message away from the novel, what would you like it to be?

YM: I would rather students take whatever they want from the novel. Reading a novel *freely* is the best way to get the most out of it, I think.

EE: What reactions to the novel from readers have surprised you the most?

YM: Oh, so many. A reader pointing out to me that 227 (the number of days that Pi spends at sea with Richard Parker), if seen as 22 over 7, is the number pi. The many interpretations of the algae island made by readers. The reader who interpreted Pi's survival with a tiger whom he feeds and cleans and who leaves him without saying good-bye as a metaphor for marriage. And so on.

I was amazed at the number of people who made the story their own in some form or other and, therefore, brought so many aspects of their own personalities to it. It is as if the book acquired a new writer each time it had a new reader.

EE: If you were to rewrite the novel now, would you do anything differently?

YM: There is no perfection in life or in literature. I've let go of *Life of Pi*. It is what it is.

EE: Are there any particular works or authors you would recommend to students who are keen to explore the issues you raise in *Life of Pi* further?

YM: I read many, many wonderful books as research for *Life of Pi*. The first one that comes to mind is *A History of God* by Karen Armstrong. It is a luminous exploration of monotheism. The second is Diane Eck's *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Benares*. These are adult books, but a keen teenager should be able to handle them.

EE: Lastly, what advice would you give to aspiring young writers?

YM: Read, read, read. Think, think, think. Write, write, write. But let go of ends. Don't write for a particular purpose, only for the joy of it.

Enrichment tasks



Exercise 1: Creative task

Imagine that you are on board a ship in the middle of the ocean. You awake in the middle of the night to strange noises and, when you leave your cabin to investigate, you discover that the ship is sinking in a violent storm. Write a **descriptive essay** in the first person describing your experience. Your answer should be approximately 350 to 450 words in length. (20)

Please note that a marking rubric for this task is provided on the companion suggested answers disc.

[20]

Exercise 2: Transactional writing

Consider the shipwreck scene you described in Exercise 1 of this section. Now adopt the role of a journalist and write a **newspaper article** reporting on the incident.



Note that while Exercise 1 called for a creative, subjective response, this task requires you to use the appropriate form, style and register for a newspaper article. Your answer should be approximately 250 to 300 words in length. (20)

Please note that assessment criteria are available in the corresponding rubric on the companion suggested answers disc.

[20]

Exercise 3: Poetry task

Consider the poem "A Question of Faith" by Vernon Scannell (1922-2007) and answer the questions that follow:

"A Question of Faith"

When I was in the top class in the school 1

Science was added to the syllabus

Of History, English, Arithmetic and Geog.

Our teacher, Archie Dawson, bald as chalk,

Did tricks with a magnet and some iron stubble, 5

Talked of magnetic fields and molecules,

Gave the rainbow a ghostly name; my brains began to clog.

I gave up trying to follow; just sat in my private fog.

And then we did an experiment. Each of us brought

An empty jam-jar to school. We were going to make 10

A Léclanché cell. (To me it sounded far

More like a dungeon in the Bastille than what

It was: a primitive electric battery.)

Into each jar old Archie poured some acid

And each one of us was given a zinc and a copper bar: 15

These we immersed in the acid in the jar.

'Now,' said Archie, 'when you get your wires

Fix one to each of the two bars in the acid

And then you'll find these bulbs I'm handing out

Will light up when the circuit is completed.' 20

There was a pause of lip-chewed concentration,

Then seconds later voices flashed out loud:

'Hey! Look at mine! It works!' some one would shout;

And some one else: 'Mine too, it works without a doubt!'

With care I joined the wires to my two bars 25

And then attached them to the flashlamp bulb.

It stayed egg white. 'Please sir, mine won't react!'

'What's that? The bulb must be a dud. Use this.

This one's all right. I've tried it out myself.'

He snuffed off; later came back: 'All right?' 30

I nodded. 'Yes sir, thanks.' But this was not a fact.

The bulb stayed white and blind. It was faith that I lacked.

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- 3.7 Identify the punctuation mark in the phrase 'jam-jar' (line 10) and explain its function in this context. (2)

- 3.8 Why does the speaker place lines 11 to 13 in parentheses, and what is being suggested by this comment? (2)

- 3.9 Identify the Figure of Speech in the phrase 'The bulb stayed white and blind' (line 32) and comment on its effectiveness in this context. (3)

3.10 Explain what is meant by the phrase 'lip-chewed concentration' (line 21). (2)

3.11 Comment on the speaker's choice of the word 'flashed' (line 22) and explain the effect that is created by his choice of diction in this context. (2)

3.12 Provide a synonym for the word 'dud' as it is used in line 28. (1)

3.13 Why does the speaker lie to his teacher in the final stanza of the poem? (2)

f the final stanza and line 32 of the poem (2)

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point to discuss the relationship between

(5)



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Reading novels for academic analysis

When reading a novel that you are required to analyse for academic purposes, it is best to approach the text in a slightly different way than you would if reading a novel for pleasure. The following are a few tips to keep in mind when reading novels for academic analysis.

- It may sound obvious, but **make sure you are paying attention** when you read. Often when we are reading, our attention wanders and we don't really take in what it is that we are reading. Be sure that when you are reading a novel for academic purposes, your attention stays focused at all times and that you are not distracted by your phone, television, friends or family members.
- **Make notes** in the page margins as you read. Marking important passages as you read them will help you save time when you are looking for them again later, and will also help to keep you focused as you read.
- **Underline unfamiliar words** so that you can look up their definitions and make a note of their meanings.
- Keep the **themes** of the novel in mind as you are reading and keep asking yourself how these themes are being conveyed and developed in the narrative. Make notes of any recurring **motifs and symbols** and what these represent in the text.
- Remember that you are reading for **meaning** (what is being said) and for **form** (how it is being conveyed). Literary analysis is about detecting patterns in the text and determining how these patterns convey particular messages.



Patterns of meaning

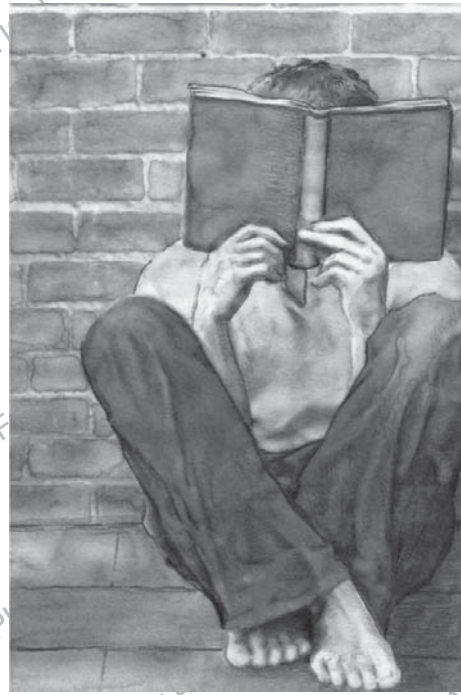
Themes (i.e. what is the text saying?)

- How is the plot structured? What happens in the narrative, and in what order?
- Where and when does the story take place?
- Who is the subject of the story?
- What are the recurring themes in the narrative?
- What message is being conveyed?
- How do you feel about what is happening in the story?

Patterns of form

Technique (i.e. how is it being said?)

- Who is the narrator of the text? When or on what occasion(s) is this narration taking place?
- How does the point of view from which the story is being told affect our understanding?
- How are the characters developed throughout the text? How do they interact with one another, and why?
- Is the narration sequential or achronological? Are there flashbacks or flash-forwards? Why is the narration structured in this way?
- What kind of symbols and motifs recur in the text? What do these symbolise, and how do they reinforce the themes of the novel?
- What do the title and chapter headings tell us about this narrative and how we should interpret it?



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Glossary of important literary terms

archetype, archetypal: a very typical or common example of a particular type of person or thing

bildungsroman: a genre of literature in which the protagonist, usually an adolescent, undergoes spiritual, intellectual, moral, psychological and/or social growth throughout the course of the narrative and, in doing so, achieves maturity (also known as a 'coming-of-age' story)

catharsis: the often painful process through which a character heals, usually through the release of strong or repressed emotions

connotation: an idea, association or feeling that is evoked by the use of a particular word, in addition to its literal meaning

context: the 'things around the text'; the particular circumstances that form the setting for a narrative event, statement or idea

dénouement: the climax or finale of a narrative in which the various strands of the plot are drawn together or resolved

diction: the choice of words used

discourse: written or spoken communication or, in literary terms, the treatment of a particular subject within the narrative

foil: a character who contrasts starkly with another character, usually the protagonist, in order to emphasise the particular qualities or traits of the other character

form: the structure or design of a particular literary work

genre: in literary terms, a genre is a particular and distinguishable category of writing which employs distinct, common conventions that are recognisable across all works of the same genre

ideology: a system of beliefs or ideals which often forms the basis for a political or economic policy, for example, apartheid

irony: a perceptible inconsistency (sometimes humorous) in an apparently straightforward statement or situation which, given its particular context, takes on the opposite meaning or significance. In the case of **dramatic irony**, the reader or audience may know more about the character's situation or circumstances than the character and is, consequently, able to recognise a sharply different or contrasting perception of the situation to the character

metaphor, metaphoric: a Figure of Speech in which one thing is taken to represent or symbolise something else, in order to transfer particular associations or qualities on to the thing or idea being represented

paradox, paradoxical: a statement that is so obviously untrue or contradictory that it leads the reader to consider alternative contexts in which it may be considered accurate; or a situation, person or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities

point of view: the position or vantage point from which the events of a story are presented to the reader

protagonist: the main/central character in the narrative

syntax: the way in which words, phrases and clauses are arranged to form a sentence

theme: the central message, idea or insight of a literary work

Summaries and analyses

Using this section

Working through the novel chapter by chapter ensures that a solid foundation of knowledge is laid, and then gradually and effectively expanded. Students are not required to deal with the entire novel until they have worked through it in a methodical, step-by-step manner. Each chapter and sub-section is summarised and analysed separately. Extensive glossaries are included and learners are required to engage with the content directly through chapter-specific questions. At the end of the summaries, there is also a series of enrichment tasks and a wide selection of rigorous essay topics, ensuring that students tackle the novel in its entirety.

Author's Note and Part One: Toronto and Pondicherry (p.ix-93)

Author's note (p.ix-xiv)

Summary

'The Author' explains how he came to write *Life of Pi*. His second novel had proven to be a failure and he decided to take a trip to India to write his next book, set in Portugal in 1939. He set himself up in a hill station to write, but soon his planned novel 'sputtered, coughed and died' (p.x). Feeling restless and in need of an idea for a new story, he decided to explore the south of India and arrived in the town of Pondicherry.



Hill stations are small Indian towns built at high-altitudes, mostly by European colonialists during the 1800s. The towns were primarily built to serve as sanctuaries where the Europeans could take breaks from the rigours of colonial life and the intensely hot and dusty summers of the plains below.

Pictured is the popular Himalayan hill station of Nainital in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. The town is set in a valley around an oval lake with majestic views of the mountains.



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In a coffee house, he struck up a conversation with an elderly gentleman named Francis Adirubasamy, who told him that he had a story 'that will make you believe in God' (p.xii). The gentleman told him the story and advised him to get in touch with the main character, Mr Patel, who lived in 'The Author's' home country of Canada. 'The Author' retells Mr Patel's story in *Life of Pi*, 'in his voice and through his eyes' (p.xiv).



© Barcroft (Condé Nast Traveller)

'You sit where you can, with whoever is at a table. [...] Conversation is easy to come by' (p.xii) The busy Indian Coffee House on College Street in Kolkata.

'If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams.' (p.xiv)

Analysis

'The Author' is a semi-fictional character created by Martel to frame the narrative of *Life of Pi*. The 'Author's Note' is a blend of fact and fiction: Martel did, in fact, travel to India to seek inspiration for his new novel, and many of the places and organisations that he mentions, such as Pondicherry, the Botanical Gardens and the Canada Council for the Arts, exist in real life; however, Francis Adirubasamy and Mr Patel are fictional characters.

By framing his story in this way, Martel is able to present it as true to the reader. He is not trying to be deceptive, but he is playing with the boundaries of 'fact' and 'fiction' — in much the same way that the main narrative of *Life of Pi* does. This is part of his larger thematic concern of exploring the nature of storytelling.



Glossary

gangly (p.ix): tall, awkward

fiasco (p.ix): disaster, mess

bamboozle (p.ix): cheat, deceive

purveyors (p.xi): suppliers, bringers

inconsequential (p.xi): of no importance

lilt (p.xiii): accent, inflection



Question

1. In your own words, explain what 'The Author' means when he says: 'If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams' (p.xiv). (2)

Chapter 1 (p.3-7)

Summary

The reader is introduced to Mr Patel, the main character of the story mentioned by 'The Author'. He recalls that his 'suffering left [him] sad and gloomy' (p.3), but that he was 'brought [...] back to life' (p.3) by academic study and the practice of religion. He recalls that he was an excellent student and at university he completed a Bachelor's degree with a double major in zoology and religious studies. He studied the **three-toed sloth** in its natural environment in Brazil and found it to be a peaceful and intriguing creature. He has never forgotten Richard Parker, he says, and was hurt by the abrupt way in which he left. He recalls his recovery in a hospital in Mexico and the difficulties he had in returning to normal life.



A tree-dwelling mammal found in South and Central America, the **three-toed sloth** is known for its peculiar, albeit cute looks and permanent enigmatic smile. The sloth has a reputation for being a slow-moving creature and that is certainly true of its metabolism, which can take as long as 30 days to digest a single leaf. The plus side of this slow digestion is that a sloth only needs to defecate once a week and this occasion is one of the few times one will climb down from the trees. The sloth may be slow on the ground, but it is an excellent swimmer and is said to be able to hold its breath under water for up to 40 minutes.



© Christian Mehlführer (Wikimedia Commons)



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blanched (p.7): became pale

Question

- (4)

The officials were unable to determine the cause of the ship sinking. Before they left, Pi asked them which version of his story they preferred, and they both admitted that the version with the animals was 'the better story' (p.317). Pi simply replied: 'And so it goes with God' (p.317). In his final report, the Japanese official chose to recount the story with the animals.



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Narration and structure

What is the author trying to say? How are we encouraged to react to the ideas presented in the novel? In this section, we examine some of the literary devices, writing techniques and structural elements that the author, Yann Martel, uses to convey the message of his novel.

The storyteller

The **narrative point of view** in the novel is complex and multi-layered in structure. Martel uses the character of 'The Author' to tell Pi's story. 'The Author' is not Martel himself, but a fictional character he uses to frame the narrative and to provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding of Pi's character.

In Parts One and Three of the novel, 'The Author' writes in the **first person** to explain how he came to tell Pi's story and to provide observations on Pi's character and home as an adult. 'The Author' is a **peripheral narrator**, since he is not a main character in the story itself and is not taking part in the main action of the narrative — he is, essentially, an observer, telling someone else's story.



© Danielle Trudeau

Pi is the **central narrator** of the novel, since it is his story that is conveyed. He, too, narrates in the **first person** to relate his experiences, providing an intimate and personal account and establishing a connection with the reader.

A third narrative technique is added in Part Three of the novel, where a word-for-word transcript is provided of an interview that takes place between two Japanese government officials and Pi, shortly after his rescue. The two officials exchange candid remarks in Japanese that are translated to the reader, but which Pi does not understand, giving us a glimpse into their true thoughts and reactions.

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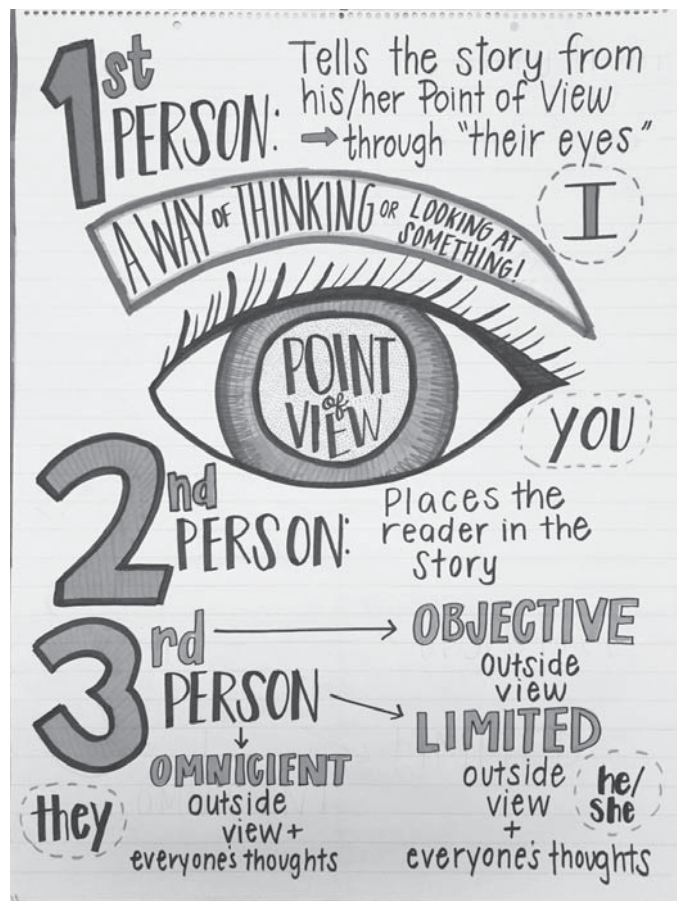


When discussing narrative point of view, the **narrative voice** (who is speaking) and **perspective** (their involvement in the story) need to be considered.

A **first person narrator** is usually a character who is directly involved in the plot in some way and who tells the story using the pronoun 'I'. Often, the first person narrator is the main character (or one of the most important characters) in the story and is referred to as the **central narrator**. Occasionally, the first person narrator may not be directly involved in the action, but is an observer of sorts and, in this case, is called a **peripheral narrator**.

A **third person narrator** is not a character in the story themselves, but has knowledge of, and access to, the actions, thoughts and feelings of the characters.

An **omniscient narrator** has equal access to the minds of all characters, while a **limited narrator** is limited to the perspectives of one or two characters.



The purpose of this complex narrative technique is to challenge the boundaries of fiction and to push the reader's sense of credulity. Through the use of the character of 'The Author', Martel is able to frame his story as a factual account of a real-life event. This portrayal is further bolstered by the use of the interview transcript in the third part of the novel. The Japanese investigators' scepticism may represent the reader's own doubts about the believability of Pi's story, and the interview allows Martel to dispel some of these doubts.

The novel, therefore, tests the limits between fact and fiction, simultaneously exploring the nature of storytelling and the idea of 'truth'. Whose 'truth', the narrative poses, is the most valid? Is there even such a thing as a single truth? Is life given meaning through the way in which we choose to tell our own story? As Pi suggests to the Japanese investigators: 'The world isn't just the way it is. It is how we understand it, no? And in understanding something, we bring something to it, no? Doesn't that make life a story?' (p.302).

Finally, the use of a complex narrative perspective provides the reader with a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies of Pi's character. Pi tells us, the readers, his story in his own words. As with any first person narrator, this allows us an intimate



look into his thoughts and beliefs, and provides the opportunity to form a picture of how the narrator views himself and what has happened to him.

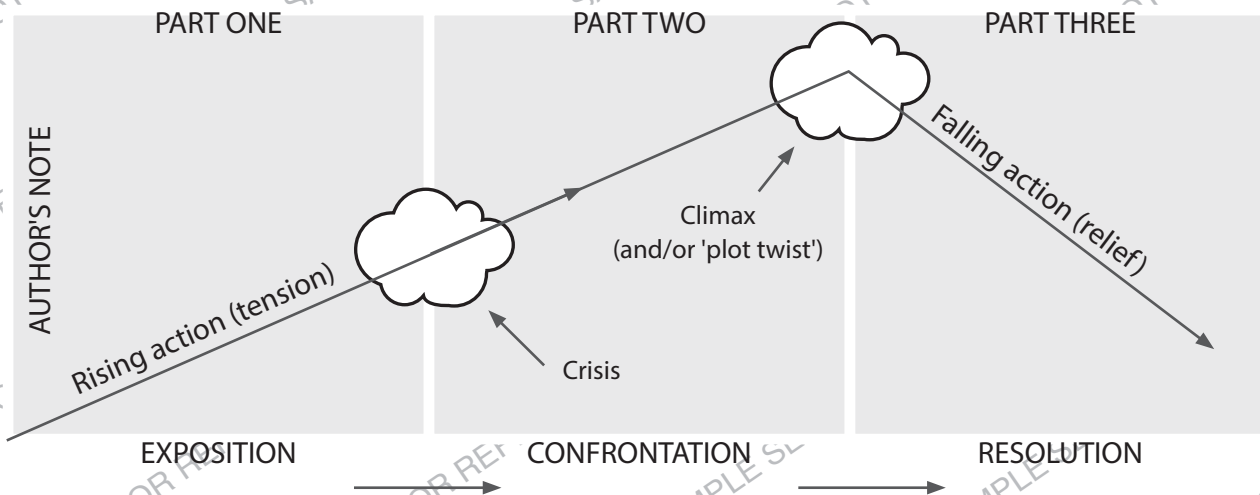
In most novels, however, this first person perspective is quite limited: our narrator is presenting himself and his environment in a certain light and in a way that is circumscribed by his own understanding and experiences. In *Life of Pi*, we are offered alternative perspectives on Pi through the characters of 'The Author' and the Japanese officials. 'The Author', in particular, is able to give the reader clues as to how Pi's experiences as a teenager have shaped his adult character. Accordingly, the multiple narrative points of view in the novel ensure that the reader has a multi-faceted understanding of the character of Pi.



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Three-part structure

The story of *Life of Pi* is structured in three distinct parts, after an 'Author's Note' that appears at the beginning of the novel. Each part adds another layer to the reader's understanding of Pi's character and his story.



The '**Author's Note**' frames the narrative as a factual retelling of a real-life story, allowing Martel to test the boundaries between fact and fiction and to explore the nuances of storytelling. The introduction of the character of 'The Author' provides an additional channel of observation that enriches the narrative with an 'outsider's perspective'.

Part One of the novel recounts Pi's childhood in India, and establishes the two most important facets of his character: his interest in animal psychology and his spiritual beliefs. In addition to enriching the reader's familiarity with his character, Part One prepares the reader for the ordeal to follow and establishes how Pi's interest in these subjects enabled his survival.

Pi's recollection of his childhood in Part One is interspersed with chapters written from the perspective of 'The Author', which reveal his observations of an adult Pi's character and his home life. These observations provide hints as to how the ordeal he endures in Part Two has shaped his character and continues to influence him as an adult.



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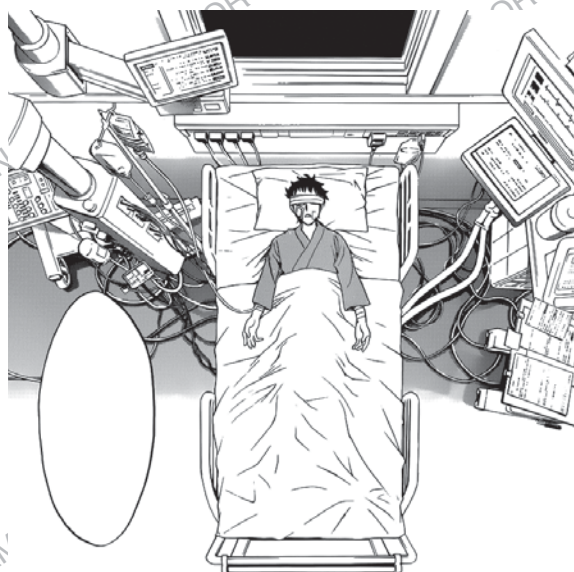


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Part Two is dedicated entirely to Pi's central story: the months he spent stranded at sea in a lifeboat with a tiger, and how he was able to survive. 'The Author' does not interject in this part of the novel — the story is entirely Pi's own — and the reader is left to form their own interpretation of the increasingly strange experiences he endures.

The final section of the novel, **Part Three**, is a transcript of an interview that takes place between Pi and two Japanese government officials shortly after he is rescued. This part is a departure from the previous sections of the novel in that it provides no subjective observations from Pi or 'The Author'. The reader is, essentially, an eavesdropper, piecing together the strands of this conversation with what he or she already knows of Pi's story.

This final section of the novel forms the thematic climax of the narrative in that it allows Martel to underscore his most prominent interests: the nuances of storytelling, the notions of truth and meaning-making, and the nature of religious belief.



© Yoshinobu Yamada

The alternative story

Part Three of the novel presents an unexpected 'twist' in the form of an alternative version of Pi's story. The two Japanese officials are sceptical of Pi's account. They ask him to tell them 'what really happened' (p.302). Pi eventually agrees to tell them 'another story' (p.303), one '[t]hat will confirm what [they] already know' (p.302) — in other words, a version of events that will not stretch the limits of their imagination or credulity.

Pi's alternative tale is a commentary on the nature of storytelling and its ability to shape our understanding of the world. It also allows Martel to explore the central theme of religion and spirituality in the novel. While the story featuring Richard Parker may be difficult for the officials to believe, the second version is horrific and traumatic in its details, despite being easier to accept as the 'truth'. When Pi asks the men which story they prefer, both agree: 'The story with the animals is the better story' (p.317). Pi responds by saying, 'And so it goes with God' (p.317).

Pi's words are key to understanding the theme of spirituality and religion in the novel. The choice between the two stories represents the difference between having faith in a higher power and agnosticism. The first version is 'the better story' (p.317), the narrative suggests, because it means that Pi's suffering served a greater purpose: his survival was ensured by a benevolent power. Moreover, through giving meaning to his suffering, the first version of Pi's story represents hope and inspiration to those who hear it.

'The stories we tell literally make the world. If you want to change the world, you need to change your story. [...] The story you tell yourself is the story of how you see the world and your place in it.'
— Michael Margolis



You see the world as you are.



'All living things contain a measure of madness that moves them in strange, sometimes inexplicable ways.' (p.41)

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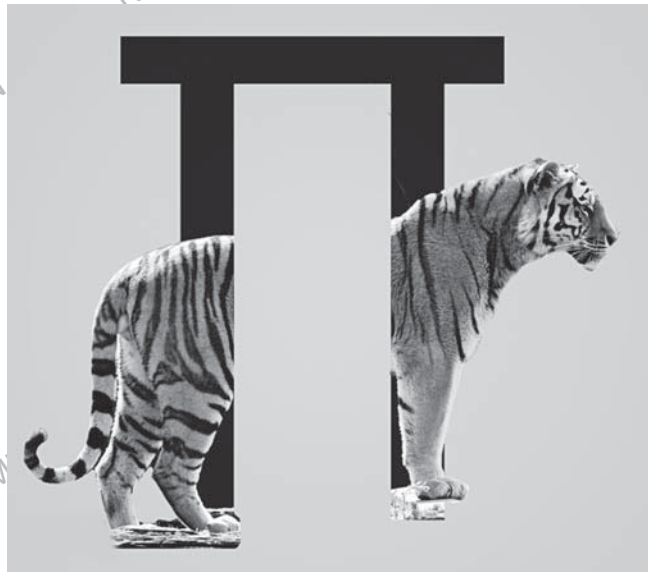
Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, shapes or colours used to represent something else, usually an abstract idea or quality. Symbols usually represent something else by association, resemblance or convention, and provide subtle clues to the deeper layers of meaning in a literary work. In this section, we examine some of the more prominent symbolism used by Martel in the novel.

Names

Many of the names that Martel chooses for his characters, animals and objects in the novel are highly symbolic, providing the reader with a glimpse into the nature of that character or what the future has in store for them.

Perhaps the most significant example of a symbolic name in the novel is that of its titular character, Piscine Molitor Patel. As discussed in the *Character analysis* section, Pi's given name reflects his connection with water, as *piscine* is French for 'swimming pool' and also means 'fish-like' in English. His name foreshadows his ordeal at sea and establishes his link to water from the outset. It also links him to the theme of storytelling: his father chose his name after being enthralled by the stories told to him by their family friend, Francis Adirubasamy, about a swimming pool in Paris called the Piscine Molitor.



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© DivineNymph (Deviantart)

His self-chosen nickname, 'Pi', also holds great significance. The mathematical constant pi (π) is an 'irrational' number in that its exact value is infinite. At the same time, pi is used extensively in mathematical and scientific formulas. The name Pi, therefore, symbolises the two sides of Pi's character: the rational, logical side and the religious, spiritual side that is less easy to quantify or rationalise. (Interestingly, pi is also the sixteenth letter of the Greek alphabet and Pi is sixteen years old when he is shipwrecked.)

Pi's companion on the lifeboat, Richard Parker, also bears a name that links him to water and their experience at sea. Pi explains that the tiger was given his name due to a 'clerical error' (p.132), which confused the animal's name with that of the hunter who caught him. Richard Parker was originally christened by the hunter as 'Thirsty' (p.133) — another name which, like Pi's, foreshadows his fate at sea.

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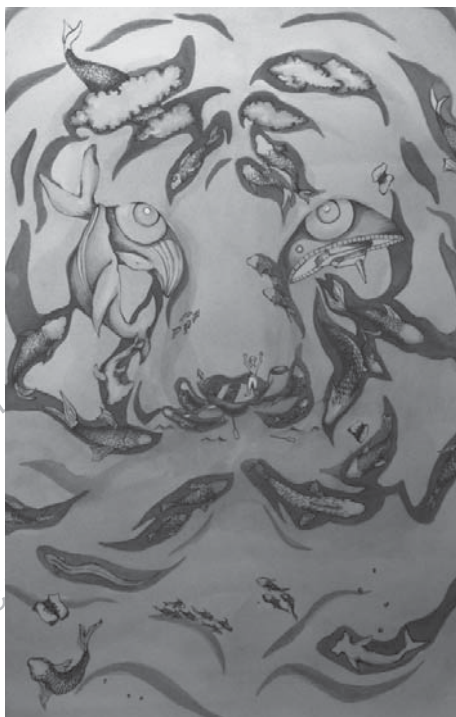
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It is also worth noting that two of 'the prophets of [Pi's] Indian youth' (p.61) share the same name. His biology teacher at secondary school and the baker who introduces Pi to Islam are both named Satish Kumar. The fact that they share a name indicates their equal importance in Pi's life and the equal impact of what each of them taught him on his character. His biology teacher instilled in him a love for, and appreciation of, science and logic. His religious guru, meanwhile, brought him closer to God and nurtured his spiritual development.



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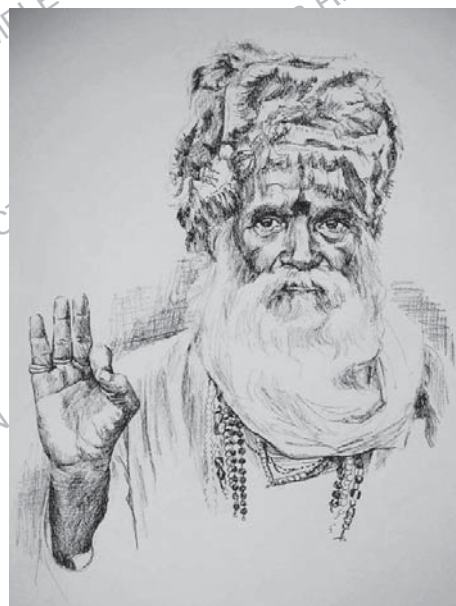
The ship that Pi and his family board on their fateful journey to Canada is also symbolically named. The word 'tsimtsum' (or tzimtzum) describes a Kabbalist concept in which God

withdraws his presence to allow for the creation of the universe. Accordingly, the ship sinking could be associated with God seemingly withdrawing from Pi's life and abandoning him, while, in fact, leaving him with the opportunity to grow as an individual and strengthen his faith.

The colour orange

The colour orange represents life, survival and hope in the novel. Many of the objects that are vital to Pi's survival at sea are coloured orange: the lifeboat itself, the tarpaulin, the lifejackets and the lifebuoy are all orange (p.138), as is the whistle he eventually uses to train Richard Parker.

Pi notes that orange is 'the colour of survival' (p.138) as well as a 'nice Hindu colour' (p.138). Orange is the most sacred of colours in the Hindu religion. It is the colour worn by Hindu holy men and it represents purity and light. The fact that Pi is surrounded by this colour on the lifeboat links his physical survival to his dependence on his faith, reinforcing the important thematic concern of spirituality and religion in the novel.



© Katie Graves

Two of the animals aboard the lifeboat are also associated with the colour orange. The tiger, Richard Parker, is black-and-orange striped and Pi readily admits that the tiger saved his life: 'He pushed me to go on living. [...] It's the plain truth: without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story' (p.164). Once again, the connection between survival and the colour orange is reinforced. The orang-utan that spends a brief period aboard the lifeboat is also reddish-orange in colour and is called Orange Juice. Although she is eventually killed, she brings Pi a sense of hope and comfort during the early days of his ordeal (p.111).



Animals

As the Japanese officials who interview Pi quickly come to realise, the animals in the first version of the story Pi tells about his ordeal at sea represent or symbolise the human survivors in the second version: ***“So the Taiwanese sailor is the zebra, his mother is the orang-utan, the cook is ... the hyena — which means he's the tiger!”*** (p.311).

The animals he chooses embody the traits of their human counterparts. The hyena, for example, symbolises the 'disgusting' (p.304) and savage cook. The zebra represents the 'beautiful' (p.304), but, ultimately, inaccessible Chinese sailor. Pi's mother is symbolised by the gentle and maternal orang-utan, Orange Juice, and Pi's mighty and irrepressible spirit is embodied by the tiger, Richard Parker.

Throughout the novel, there is also a play between the characteristics that humans and animals share. As a child growing up in Pondicherry Zoo, Pi has a tendency to anthropomorphise the zoo animals, admitting that he 'quite deliberately dressed wild animals in tame costumes of [his] imagination' (p.34); however, his father warns him against the dangers of what he calls *Animalus anthropomorphicus* or 'the animal as seen through human eyes' (p.31); in other words, the tendency of human beings to project



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or impose their own preconceived qualities onto animals. A wild animal, Pi's father impresses on his children, is unpredictable and driven entirely by the instinct to survive.

Pi's 'fierce will to live' (p.148) brings out surprisingly animalistic qualities in his own behaviour. The more desperate his situation becomes the more '[he] descended to a level of savagery [he] never imagined possible' (p.197). To ensure his survival, he becomes an adept hunter and overcomes his distaste for eating flesh, noting that he 'ate like an animal, that this noisy, frantic, unchewing wolfing-down of [his] was exactly the way Richard Parker ate' (p.225).

The algae island

The algae island is strongly associated with the themes of religion and survival in the novel. The island is Pi's 'Garden of Eden': a fantastical place that appears almost as though by magic during Pi's most desperate days at sea, providing sustenance and a reprieve that ensures his survival. The association of the island with religion and spirituality are immediately established as Pi attempts to step off the boat onto the algae shore, convinced that it will not support his weight and prove to be an illusion (p.258). As he takes his first tentative steps, the reader is reminded of the story of Jesus walking on water.

Pi's life is saved by the island. He believes that he 'might have lived for years — why, for the rest of [his] life — on that island' (p.279). Like the Garden of Eden, however, his paradise holds a dark and threatening secret that eventually drives him away. Pi discovers a tree on the island that bears fruit. Upon closer inspection of the tree, however, he discovers that each piece of fruit has a human tooth concealed within it, leading him to the conclusion that the island is carnivorous and that his life is in danger. Much like Eve, who eats the forbidden fruit from the 'Tree of Knowledge' in the book of Genesis in the Christian Bible, Pi is forced to leave paradise behind him by the discovery.



Ritual and religious iconography

Ritual and religious iconography both link back to the themes of survival and spirituality in the novel. Pi frequently refers to religious stories and figures in his narrative, reminding the reader of the importance of religion to his character and his understanding of the world. This is also reflected in the iconography in his house in Canada, which 'The Author' describes as 'a temple' (p.45).

Pi relies heavily on his faith in God to sustain him during his months lost at sea. The rituals of his three religions, which he 'adapted to the circumstances' (p.208), bring him comfort, just as they did throughout his youth. For Pi, religious ritual, whether it was Muslim prayer or communion at church, was an outward expression of faith that made him feel closer to God.

Pi also finds comfort in other forms of ritual, nonetheless. He discovers that keeping to a strict daily routine is 'one key to [his] survival' (p.190), not only because it ensures that the practicalities of food and water are managed, but because it helps to pass the agonisingly tedious hours. Ritual and repetitive routine also assist in the training of Richard Parker.



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Learn from your mistakes

Before you begin writing, look at your past essays and take note of any mistakes or advice from your marker(s). Keep these pointers in mind when writing your essay and actively try to improve on these areas. In the examination context, reflect on what has gone wrong in the past or bad habits your marker has identified before you start writing.



Using online information

When planning your essay, you may be tempted to search online for ideas and inspiration. Think twice before you do this, though, as anyone can post their ideas on the internet and these ideas may not necessarily be useful or even correct. In fact, more often than not, the information you can find on the internet about literary texts is very poor; moreover, your marker is interested in what *you* think of the topic, not what a random internet source says.

Keep in mind that if you use secondary sources in your essay, either in the classroom context or the examination context, you need to reference these correctly. If you do not reference ideas that are not your own, you will be guilty of plagiarism, a form of intellectual theft that is very likely to lose you marks and is a serious legal offence.

Annotated essay examples

Essay topic 1:

In an essay of approximately 600 words, examine the way in which Pi's name functions as a symbol in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, commenting particularly on the way in which this symbol develops the central thematic concerns of the novel. (30)



Notes on the essay topic:

- This question requires you to **examine** the symbolic significance of the titular character's name in the novel.
- Your analysis should focus specifically on the **importance of Pi's name in developing some of the central themes** of the novel.
- **Key words** include 'examine', 'symbol', 'develops' and 'thematic concerns'. You should try to use some of these words in the essay itself.



In preparation for Grade 12, the two annotated essay examples provided here are between 500 and 600 words in length.

Introduction

Essay:

Many of the names that Yann Martel has chosen for his characters in Life of Pi carry symbolic significance. This is particularly true of its titular character, Piscine Molitor "Pi" Patel, whose name not only reveals his personality traits, but also foreshadows his future and develops the thematic concerns of storytelling and spirituality in the novel. Pi's given name underlines his association with water and the art of storytelling, while his self-chosen nickname reflects the development of his character as a young adult.

Pi's unusual given name was inspired by a family friend, Francis "Mamaji" Adirubasamy, who entertained Pi's father with his stories of his youth in Paris. In particular, Pi's father loved his stories about the Piscine Molitor, a swimming pool Adirubasamy frequented in the city. The word 'piscine' holds particular significance for Pi's character: in French, it translates as 'swimming pool', while in English it means 'fish-like'. His given first name therefore emphasises Pi's connection to water and foreshadows his ordeal at sea after the shipwreck. Moreover, its origins remind the reader of the importance of the art of storytelling in the novel and its potential to inspire aspiration and hope: as Pi notes, in telling his story, 'Mamaji remembered, Father dreamed' (p.12).

Body

The nickname that Pi chooses to adopt in secondary school, by contrast, gives the reader some insight into his developing character and what is important to him. The timing of his adoption of this name is significant and indicates a 'coming-of-age' moment for Pi. His careful planning in 'training' (p.23) his schoolmates and teachers to use his new name reinforces its importance to him. The mathematical constant pi (π) is used by scientists and mathematicians in various formulae, and it alludes to Pi's interest in science and the natural world. At the same time, however, pi is an irrational number, meaning that its exact value is infinite. This characteristic lends it a certain mysteriousness that is impossible to quantify or rationalise, much like Pi's devotion to spiritual fulfilment.

Comments:

Note the structure of the introductory paragraph: the thesis statement is indicated in **bold** (this is the main argument to which we will refer throughout the essay). The underlined sentences give a 'preview' of the argument, as these are the topics that will be discussed in the body of the essay.

In the second paragraph, the sentence in **bold** indicates the topic sentence. This is the point with which this paragraph will deal. The quotations and examples from the text support the claim being made by the topic sentence. The underlined sentences form the analysis or elaboration of this point and explain its relevance to the thesis statement. Note how direct quotations can be integrated in different ways: in this paragraph, the quote is grammatically incorporated into the sentence.

Take note of the 'T-E-A' structure of this paragraph (Topic sentence – Evidence – Analysis). The sentence in **bold** is the topic sentence; the quotations and examples provide evidence, and the underlined sentences are the analysis of this point.



Providing a page reference when quoting may not be possible in an examination context, but you should still alert your examiner to the fact that you are quoting or paraphrasing from the novel.

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Consequently, Pi's nickname represents two sides of his character: his rational, logical side that finds satisfaction in science, and his spiritual side that reaches after answers in the doctrines of religion. While these may seem to be contradictory qualities, they exist harmoniously and in balance in Pi's character. Accordingly, Pi's choice of nickname is highly symbolic as it is 'in that elusive, irrational number with which scientists try to understand that universe [that he] found refuge' (p.24).

Pi's nickname, therefore, comes to symbolise the means by which he seeks meaning in his experiences and the framework through which he understands life. It addresses the thematic concern of spirituality versus science in the novel, while demonstrating how these principles are balanced within Pi's character.

Conclusion

Pi's given name, by contrast, alludes to the power of the art of storytelling while, at the same time, foreshadowing the role that water will play in Pi's future. The titular character is, therefore, an excellent example of how the names Martel chooses in his novel are highly symbolic in their representation of his characters and thematic concerns.

Note the use of the connective word 'consequently' to link paragraphs, which ensures the logical organisation and progression of the argument. Other connectives include 'furthermore', 'moreover', 'further to', 'in addition to' etc.

Also note how this paragraph brings together the two points made in the previous paragraph to drive home the main argument.

The concluding paragraph sums up the argument, drawing on words and phrases used in both the question and the introduction, but restated in an original way. The sentence in **bold** indicates a restatement of the thesis statement.

Essay topic 2:

'If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams.' (p.xiv)

Using the quotation provided as a starting point, discuss the function of the character of 'The Author' in *Life of Pi*, with particular reference to the way in which he frames the narrative in the novel. (30)



Notes on the essay topic:

- This question requires you to provide an **analysis** of the *function* of the character of 'The Author'. You are **not** being asked for a character analysis of 'The Author', but to discuss the way in which this character frames the narrative. *Make sure your response answers the question.*
- The provided quotation should be used as a **guideline for the direction in which your argument should develop**.
- Key words** include 'quotation provided', 'starting point', 'discuss', 'function', 'particular reference', 'frames' and 'narrative'. You should try to use some of these words in the essay itself.

Introduction

Essay:

The narrative structure of Yann Martel's Life of Pi is complex, in that Yann Martel chooses two characters to relate the story: the titular character Pi, and the unnamed character of 'The Author'. The purpose of 'The Author' is to frame the narrative in such a way that the boundaries between fact and fiction are challenged, and the thematic concern of storytelling is developed. Martel achieves this through the multiple layering of Pi's story and its presentation as a retelling of a real-life event.

The quotation provided is used deliberately to bring the reader's attention to the importance of the art of storytelling – one of Martel's central thematic concerns in the novel. In this quote, 'The Author' is suggesting that artists, including storytellers, play an important role in society in that they have the ability to inspire ambition and aspirations. Stories, he says, can spark a person's creative flair and prompt them to imagine a reality beyond their own, which, in turn, can motivate them to aspire to greater things. Without such creativity, life would be 'dry' and 'yeastless' (p.302), and society would stagnate.

This powerful message forms the basis of the theme of storytelling in the novel, which is further developed by its narrative structure. Through introducing the character of 'The Author', Martel presents Pi's story as an account of a real-life event and, in doing so, blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. 'The Author' is the gatekeeper of Pi's story: he holds himself accountable for the authenticity of the narrative, telling the reader that 'any inaccuracies or mistakes are [his own]' (p.xiv). The portrayal of Pi as a real person is further bolstered in Part One of the novel, where 'The Author' frequently inserts his own observations of Pi's character.

Body

Comments:

Note the structure of the introductory paragraph; the thesis statement or main argument is indicated in **bold**, while the underlined sentence provides a 'preview' of how this argument will be explored.

In the second paragraph, the argument refers to the provided quotation directly, as instructed. The quotation is explained and used as a means of introducing the main point of the argument and the thematic concern that will be explored. The quotations from the text support the claim being made by the topic sentence, which is indicated in **bold**. The underlined sentences form the analysis or elaboration of this point and explain its relevance to the thesis statement.

Take note of the slight variation of the 'T-E-A' structure of this paragraph (Topic sentence – Evidence – Analysis). The sentence in **bold** is the topic sentence and the underlined portion is the analysis of this point. The quotations and examples provide evidence of this analysis. Providing a page reference may not be possible in an examination context, but you should still alert your examiner that you are quoting or paraphrasing from the novel.

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This breaking down of the boundaries between fact and fiction prompts the reader to question the idea of 'truth' as it relates to storytelling. The presence of 'The Author' within the narrative framework draws attention to the way in which 'the truth' is constructed and invested with meaning. As Pi suggests to the Japanese investigators: 'The world isn't just the way it is. It is how we understand it, no? And in understanding something, we bring something to it, no? Doesn't that make a life a story?' (p.302). Pi's words demonstrate that the choices a person makes in telling a story invests their experiences with meaning and impacts on the way in which that meaning is conveyed to an audience.

Conclusion

The presence of 'The Author' in Life of Pi, therefore, develops the author's central thematic concern of storytelling and its relationship to truth and meaning-making. 'The Author' is the first character to draw the reader's attention to the potential power of storytelling and its importance to the fabric of society. 'The Author' functions to frame the narrative in such a way that the reader is prompted to question the differences between fact and fiction, and to explore the very nature of 'truth'.

Note how this paragraph brings together the two points made in the previous paragraph to drive home the main argument.

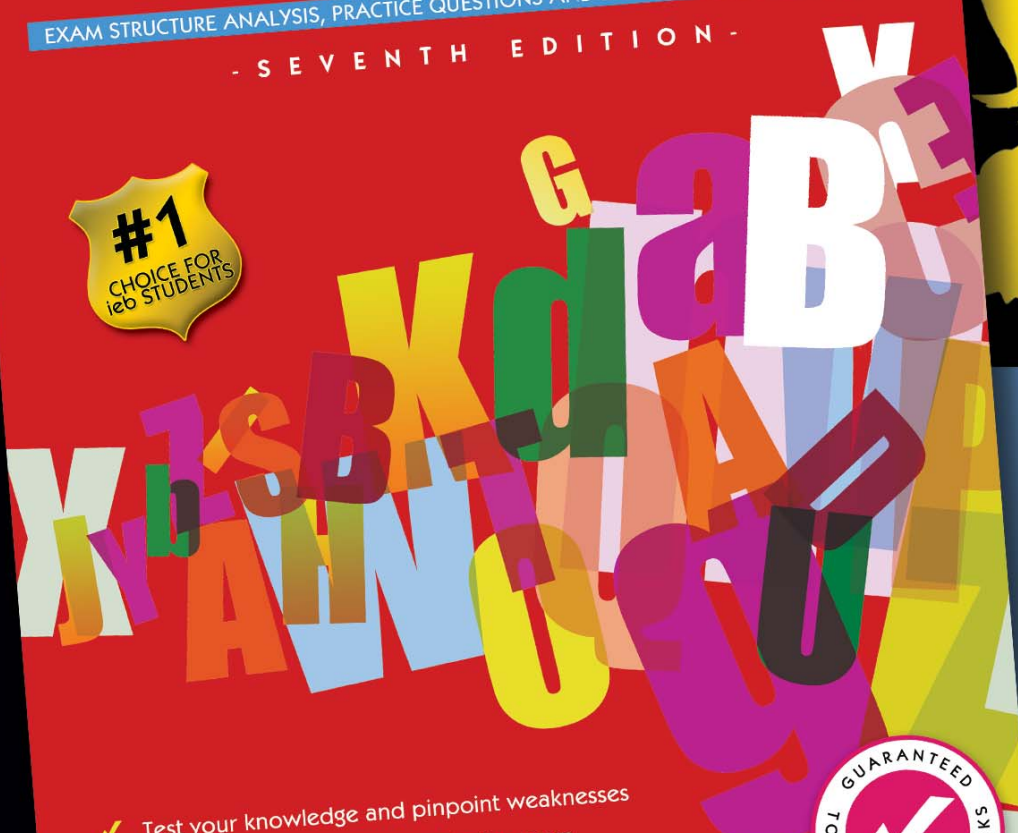
The concluding paragraph sums up the argument, drawing on words and phrases used in both the question and the introduction, but restated in an original way. The sentence in **bold** indicates a restatement of the thesis statement.

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