

English 8 / Dr. Eicher
Summer Reading 2020
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Please read both Lois Lowry's *The Giver* & Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*.

- You may read these novels in print or electronic versions.
- You must purchase your own copies of the two novels.
- Both novels are required reading. Please do not pick just one— you absolutely must read them both.
- If you have already read these novels, reread them.
- You are not required to send me a postcard, or an email, or communicate with me in any way over the summer when you have completed the books.
- There will be a 100 point test made up of short answer questions (responses 4 to 5 complete sentences in length) over both novels.
- The summer reading test is a crucial part of your first quarter grade.
- The summer reading test will be administered during the first full week of classes — quite likely on the Monday of that week.
- Any reading notes you personally take over the novels can be used on the test you will take in August.
- Please avoid all internet sites that offer literary interpretations, summaries, theories, and analysis, such as SparkNotes. Please do your own reading and your own thinking.
- I highly recommend starting your reading in June and starting your reading with *Life of Pi*. Please break up the reading and do it with great care.
- Having a reading partner for *Life of Pi* could prove helpful: if you coordinate with someone in the class and set page targets and date targets for reading, and then meet or phone each other to discuss what you've read, it could help keep you on track, and help you work through things you don't understand in the book via discussion.
- If you find it particularly challenging to read *Life of Pi*, and you have a reading partner, reading certain parts out loud to each other might help you get through what you might consider the less interesting parts — that's just an idea you might try.
- We will be watching the 2014 movie of *The Giver* in class, so if possible, please do not watch it over the summer.
- If you lose this sheet, it is on the website under English 8 Summer Reading.

Optional Study Questions for *Life of Pi*

You are not required to write out answers to the following questions. However, if you do, you will be much, much, much more prepared for testing over *Life of Pi* in August, and writing your first essay on *Life of Pi* in early September. As you read, if you think about these questions, it should help you to understand the main ideas that the author, Yann Martel, is asking you to consider. If you think of *Life*

of *Pi* strictly in terms of “what happens” (plot) you will be likely frustrated (the “exciting” lifeboat part takes about 100 pages to happen) and overwhelmed (how to remember it all). But if you think of the major ideas being put forth in the novel, then it all becomes more manageable and enjoyable. These are questions designed to make you think, to make you interact with the text to create meaning. Just knowing the plot is a very elementary reading skill, and part of what we’ll be learning to do in English 8 is to read critically--way beyond just being able to regurgitate the plot. To this end, Martel’s *Life of Pi* is an excellent way to begin.

Study Questions: PART ONE, *Toronto & Pondicherry* (almost 100 pages)

1. You MUST read the “Author’s Note.” Keep in mind that the Author in the Author’s Note is NOT the same as Yann Martel. The Author (whose name we never learn) is a *character* created by Martel. The chapters written in italics are by the Author (not Martel). With this crucial distinction made, here is the question: What point of view do you get from the Author (as made up by the italicized chapters)?
2. How does Piscine Molitor Patel get the name “Pi”? How/why?
3. What important principles does Pi learn about the **animal** world from growing up as the son of a zookeeper?
4. What important principles does Pi learn about the **human** world from growing up as the son of a zookeeper?
5. What does Pi learn as a child about animals’ sense of territory?
6. What does Pi find attractive about Christianity?
7. What does Pi find attractive about Islam?
8. What does Pi find attractive about Hinduism?
9. How does Pi feel about God?
10. If you asked Pi what defined his “community” in Pondicherry, what do you think he would say and why?
11. What links to water does Pi establish in PART ONE?
12. What is the mathematical significance of *pi* (3.14)?
13. What characterizes Pi’s relationship with his father? His relationship with his mother? His relationship with his brother?

Study Questions: PART TWO, *The Pacific Ocean* (almost 200 pages)

1. How does Pi’s zoo-childhood prepare him for the interactions of the zebra, the hyena, the orangutan, and the tiger on the lifeboat? Is anything surprising to him? Why or why not?
2. How does Richard Parker get his name?
3. How--specifically--does Pi feel about losing his father? His mother? His brother?
4. When and how do the stories of Christianity enter into Pi’s experience on the lifeboat?
5. When and how do the stories of Islam enter into Pi’s experience on the lifeboat?
6. When and how do the stories of Hinduism enter into Pi’s experience on the lifeboat?
7. What does Pi’s time on the lifeboat do to his faith in God?
8. How does Pi’s perception of the ocean as a lonely place change over time? Why?

9. What does Pi's list in Chapter 52 of PART TWO say about what he values as a person?
10. How does Pi and Richard Parker's lifeboat "community" work? What are the rules? What are the patterns? What is the hierarchy? How is it established?
11. Why is keeping Richard Parker alive so important to Pi?
12. What practices does Pi have to give up while on the lifeboat? Why? How does the loss of these practices make him feel?
13. During his time on the lifeboat, what does Pi learn about the **differences** between humans and animals?
14. During his time on the lifeboat, what does Pi learn about the **similarities** between humans and animals?
15. Ready for some fun? Rank these as to which is more unsettling to you & why: An animal eating a plant? An animal eating an animal? An animal eating a human? A human eating a plant? A human eating an animal? A human eating a human? A plant eating a plant? A plant eating an animal? A plant eating a human? Would Pi agree with your ranking? Why? Or why not?
16. How/why does Pi's attitude about killing other living beings change?
17. What rituals does Pi practice on the lifeboat? Why? What effect does it have on his quality of life?
18. What is the difference between being an "animal" or being a "human"? Do circumstances matter? In your opinion, are there some absolute differences between these two categories that never, ever change?
19. Why is Pi so incredibly sad when Richard Parker leaves him?
20. While on the lifeboat, what stories does Pi tell, remember, learn, care about, and write down? Significance?

Study Questions: PART THREE, *Benito Juarez Infirmary, Tomatlan, Mexico* (approximately 30 pages)

1. Martel's character, the Author, reappears (italic sections). What purpose does he serve in PART THREE? Can he be trusted? Why or why not?
2. Why do the Japanese interrogators doubt Pi's story in chapter 97 (the one we read in PART TWO)?
3. Did **you** doubt Pi as a narrator when you read PART TWO? Why or why not?
4. For you, is there a difference between "truth" and "fact"? Would Pi agree with you? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe in phenomena that you've never seen? Would Pi agree with you? Why or why not?
6. Why are some things in life "hard to believe"? Would Pi agree with you? Why or why not?
7. What does it mean to "have faith"? Would Pi agree with you? Why or why not?
8. What does Pi see as the link between faith and stories?
9. Which of the two stories Pi tells in PART THREE do you believe really happened?
10. When the Japanese interrogators pick one story as "better," Pi says, "and so it goes with God." What does Pi mean by that response?

