

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***Life of Pi* by Yann Martel**

English Language Arts, 12th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is the story of a young man who survives a harrowing shipwreck and months in a lifeboat with a large Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. The beginning of the novel covers Pi's childhood and youth. His family owns and runs a zoo in their hometown in India, and his father is emphatic about being aware of the wildness and true nature of animals, namely that they are not meant to be treated like or thought of as people. Pi goes through a significant religious awakening in his formative years, eventually subscribing to a variety of religions: Hinduism, Catholicism, and finally Islam. Although the religious leaders don't accept Pi's plural religions, his family gradually does, and he remains a devout follower of all his religious paths for his entire life.

When Pi is a teenager, his family decides to sell the animals and immigrate to Canada on a cargo ship named *Tsimtsum*. A terrible storm occurs during the voyage, and when Pi, excited to see the storm, goes onto the ship's deck, he is tossed overboard and into a lifeboat by the crew. The next morning, he finds himself in the company of a badly injured zebra, a vicious hyena, and a matronly orangutan named Orange Juice. Hiding out of sight, beneath the canvas of the lifeboat, is the tiger Richard Parker.

How Pi and Richard Parker survive in the Pacific Ocean makes up the rest of the novel. Pi realizes he must survive the elements while adrift in the lifeboat—and that Richard Parker will almost certainly eat him.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 1: Language and Perspective**
 - Essential Question: "How does language influence perspective?"
- **Unit 3: Personal Responsibility**
 - Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"
- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.12.2
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.12.5
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.12.3
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.12.4
- Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant. RL.12.6
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text. RL.12.7
- Demonstrate knowledge of foundational works of American and world literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics. RL.12.9
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. RL.12.10
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.12