



LIFE OF PI

STUDY GUIDE

LIFE OF PI



WELCOME

Teachers are encouraged to use this guide to elicit student discussion before the show, guide them through aspects of the production, and engage them in activities once they return to the classroom.

Our goal is to help teachers utilize the production as a catalyst for student education, collaboration, and inspiration, incorporating these essential concepts:

- Survival and Resilience
- Faith and Spirituality
- The Power of Storytelling
- Isolation and Human Connection
- The Relationship Between Humans and Animals
- The Nature of Reality and Perception
- Understanding characters' situations, actions, words, and points of view
- Contemplating characters' journeys in concert with personal experience

Life of Pi is an epic tale of adventure. This Tony Award® and Olivier Award-winning hit is “an exhilarating evening of theater” (The Wall Street Journal) and “gives new life to Broadway” (The Today Show). After a shipwreck in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a sixteen-year-old boy named Pi survives on a lifeboat with four companions— a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan and a Royal Bengal tiger. A truly remarkable story unfolds of hope, faith, and perseverance that speaks to every generation. Told through incomparable puppetry and exquisite stagecraft, *Life of Pi* creates a visually breathtaking journey that will leave you filled with awe and joy.

We hope that your students, inspired by the production, can learn from you and from each other through these activities.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

CHARACTERS

Pi and the tiger are the sole characters on stage for most of the play, but others are mentioned too.

PI: The teenage son of zookeepers in India is the sole human survivor when a cargo ship goes down in the Pacific Ocean. Adrift in a lifeboat, his journey of survival is both physical and spiritual.

THE BENGAL TIGER: The big cat brought to life through puppet wizardry in the lifeboat goes from being a ferocious predator to Pi's unlikely companion over 227 days at sea. The tiger's name is Richard Parker.

THE ANIMALS: Three other animals – an orangutan, hyena, and zebra – are also shipwrecked with Pi and Richard Parker at the start of the show.

Other minor characters include Pi's family members, a survival guide author, a transport investigator, and a consulate official.



LIFE OF PI West End • Hiran Abeysekera and Richard Parker puppeteers • Photo by Johan Persson

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION



LIFE OF PI A.R.T. • Rajesh Bose, Hiran Abeysekera • Photo by Matthew Murphy & Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

SYNOPSIS

Life of Pi by Yann Martel tells the story of Piscine Molitor Patel, or Pi, a young Indian boy who survives a shipwreck. The book starts with an author's note about how the story came to be. It introduces Pi's childhood in Pondicherry, India, where his family owns a zoo and Pi is interested in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, which worries his father.

When Pi is a teenager, his family moves to Canada, taking their animals on a Japanese cargo ship. The ship encounters a storm and sinks, leaving Pi alone on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, a zebra, a hyena, and an orangutan.

Pi faces extreme challenges as he fights for survival, dealing with hunger, thirst, and the dangerous animals on the lifeboat. He uses his knowledge of zoology and his faith to endure. Over time, he forms a fragile bond with Richard Parker, realizing they need each other to survive.

After 227 days adrift, Pi and Richard Parker reach Mexico. Richard Parker disappears into the jungle, and Pi is rescued. When officials question him about his journey, they find his story hard to believe. Pi then offers an alternative version where the animals are replaced by human characters from the ship.

The officials prefer this more believable story, but Pi leaves it up to the reader to decide which version of events is true. The novel explores themes of faith, survival, and the nature of storytelling.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

TIMELINE

2001: Yann Martel publishes the *Life of Pi* novel. Though more than five publishing houses rejected the book at first, *Life of Pi* went on to receive critical acclaim and multiple awards.

2012: *Life of Pi* receives a film adaptation, directed by Ang Lee. The film also receives acclaim and wins four Oscars out of 11 nominations.

2019: *Life of Pi* premieres at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, England.

2021: *Life of Pi* transfers to the Wyndham's Theatre in London's West End.

2022: The pre-Broadway premiere takes place at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

2023: *Life of Pi* premieres on Broadway and goes on to win three Tony® Awards for Best Scenic, Lighting & Sound Design.

2023: *Life of Pi* UK tour launches.

2024: *Life of Pi* begins its American tour.

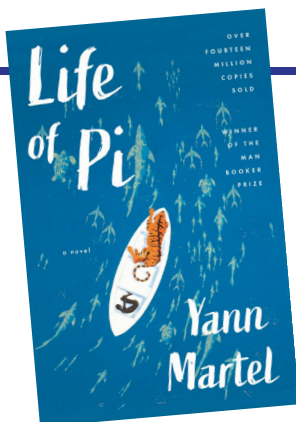
AWARDS

WHATSONSTAGE AWARDS: The Sheffield production of *Life of Pi* won the prize for Best New Play.

UK THEATRE AWARDS: The Sheffield production won four of these honors, including Best New Play and Best Director.

OLIVIER AWARDS: The West End production of the play won five Laurence Olivier Awards, including Best New Play, Best Director, Best Actor (for Hiran Abeysekera as Pi), and Best Supporting Actor (for the seven puppeteers playing the tiger).

TONY® AWARDS: *Life of Pi* received three Tony Awards. It won Best Lighting Design of a Play (Tim Lutkin), Best Scenic Design of a Play (Tim Hatley and Andzrej Goulding), and Best Sound Design of a Play (Carolyn Downing) in 2023.



The *Life of Pi* book won multiple awards, including the Booker Prize for fiction, the Boeke Prize, and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature.

Image: [Harper Collins](https://www.harpercollins.com)

CREATIVE INSIGHTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH YANN MARTEL



YANN MARTEL (Novelist) is a Canadian writer. He is the author of a collection of short stories and four novels, most notably *Life of Pi*, for which he won the 2002 Man Booker Prize. Writing credits include: *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*, *Self*, *Life of Pi*, *Beatrice and Virgil*, *The High*

Mountains of Portugal and the non-fiction collection *101 Letters to a Prime Minister: The Complete Letters to Stephen Harper*. Martel is presently at work on *Son of Nobody*, a novel about the Trojan War. He lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with the writer Alice Kuipers and their four children.

Can you start by telling us about the novel?

Life of Pi is a literary novel which means that it follows fewer rules than genre-based fiction. With romances, murder mysteries, thrillers etc, there are rules and conventions. However, with literary fiction the lack of rules means that it's more personal, but it can make the work harder to read. Literary novels plumb the depths of life. I'd say that *Life of Pi* has elements of adventure and is also highly philosophical. It has religious elements, and it's set in an exotic setting. The novel is an exploration of particular questions, and each of my novels has explored one particular question I was interested in. Here it's religious faith.

What are the themes of the novel?

Life of Pi explores the idea that life is an interpretation. It's not just about facts, but how you interpret those facts. You can have one set of facts that can generate two entirely different stories. This is key in *Life of Pi*. At the heart of *Life of Pi* is this notion that a ship sinks and after 227 days a

boy arrives on the coast of Mexico in a life boat. These facts are incontrovertible, but what happens in between is not. One is a story with animals, one is a story without.

In the theatrical adaptation, both stories are told equally and the audience is free to choose between those two stories. Do you want to live a life that cleaves most to reason and facts, or one that takes greater leaps of the imagination? It's the latter version where art and religion become important notions.

When I wrote the book, I didn't concern myself with what the book might mean to people. I had a notion of two stories based on the same set of facts and the same number of characters.

When it was unexpectedly successful, I was often asked about the meaning of Richard Parker. Initially I drew a blank! Then all these perceptive readers were giving me answers which I then started feeding to my next group of readers! Broadly speaking there are two stories told in parallel and the characters are paired off. The zebra is the Taiwanese sailor, the orangutan is paired off with Pi's mother, the hyena is the French cook, and then the pair we have left is Richard Parker and Pi. They symbolically echo each other. Both share a dogged desire to live, and keep living, and both do what needs doing to achieve that.

What interpretations have people offered about the meaning of the novel?

Some interpretations would say that the tiger is a figment of Pi's imagination and symbolizes his determination to survive. In this version, he can't accept what he did - that he killed the cook who killed his mother. He survived, but at what cost? Perhaps it is all a big lie he told himself to make an ugly truth acceptable. Some people say the tiger could be God - at one point Pi says he couldn't have survived without the tiger; it gave him a reason to live. Many people would say that about the Divine - it's something that keeps Pi alive. The Old Testament talks of the fear of God, so Pi is

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both in love with and frightened of Richard Parker. One person even said the relationship between Richard Parker and Pi is a metaphor for marriage! The most obvious interpretation is that it's a parallel – Richard Parker is a parallel creature to Pi.

What are the challenges of adapting a novel for stage or screen?

Writing a book involves writing and rewriting, and then your editor tells you to rewrite even more! Books take a long time to write but they tend to be a successful form of storytelling. The challenge for the adaptation of any novel is that you necessarily lose something moving from one to another. Each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses and you write for that specific medium.

Adaptation is difficult. You gain a lot though – the immediacy of the actors, for example. You gain the fact that the audience has already agreed to suspend their disbelief (whereas cinema needs lots of special effects to achieve the same effect). People who've read the book will recognize the novel in the play or movie.

They'll fill in any holes that might be in the adaptation. Adaptation just tells a story in a different way. Some people are natural readers, who enjoy the quiet of reading, and when you read a book you're sort of creating a little movie in your mind. That's very empowering, you are the director, the designer etc. Others prefer visual and aural storytelling, and the play or cinema provides the social experience too. I don't need to be possessive!

How were you involved in creating the adaptation?

I assisted at one week of workshopping, but I stepped back very quickly because I immediately recognized this was not my language. I can understand the language of prose and novel writing, but the language of theatre is a different instrument.

Adaptation within the rehearsal room is very collaborative, whereas I'm used to writing in the

quiet of my mind. What works on the page doesn't necessarily work on the stage, and vice versa. Therefore you have to let go, and trust the artists who are adapting the story because they know what they're doing and it's their artistic risk.

I had a lunchtime conversation with Lolita Chakrabarti (playwright) – we discussed the novel in detail and I told her what the novel is about for me. Of course, everyone has their own interpretation and Lolita has done a great job. She periodically showed me drafts, but I would only guide with small things such as 'this doesn't sound like something Pi would say' but nothing much more than that.

I remember giving the odd little perspective. For example, there were discussions about the other people who would arrive when Pi reaches Mexico. But those people can't see the tiger – the only person who can witness Richard Parker is Pi. If someone is adapting one's work, we must trust the risk taking of the adapters – the more freedom they have, the better the adaptation will be.

Life of Pi is a tricky story to adapt because the mistake most people make is that they have to get to the boy in the lifeboat in the Pacific as quickly as possible. In fact, not much happens once he's on the boat – it's a domestic drama and there's a guy and his big cat, he periodically feeds his big cat, and he loses weight. The real tension comes at the end in the hospital in Mexico when you realize there are two stories being told.

What advice can you give to anyone who's adapting a novel into a play?

Well, what I'd say is when adapting a novel or a story, you need to look where its heart lies. What is the actual moving force?

That's the same with any book – you need to ask what it's really about. Some people get caught up in what's loudest and flashiest which isn't necessarily where the story is at. Go deeper and see what's really driving the story.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LOLITA CHAKRABARTI



LOLITA CHAKRABARTI (Playwright) is an actress and award-winning playwright. She won an Olivier, WhatsOnStage and UK Theatre Award for Best New Play for *Life of Pi*. Her adaptation of *Hamnet* recently opened at The RSC and London's West End. Her debut play *Red Velvet* earned her the Evening Standard Charles Wintour Award and The Critics' Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright and an Olivier Award nomination. Other writing includes *Hymn*, *Invisible Cities*, *Calmer*, dramaturg on *Message In A Bottle* and *Sylvia*. Lolita trained at RADA and has worked as an actress on stage and screen for 35 years.

When did you first read the novel and how did you get involved with the production?

I read the book in 2002 when it first came out and I loved it. Of course, I had no idea that I would eventually be asked to adapt it! Before I was commissioned for this project, I had adapted a film into a radio play but I hadn't really adapted much before!

Is there one way of interpreting the story?

I spoke to Yann when I was commissioned to adapt his novel. I met him in London and my first question to him was "what really happened?" He said, "if you lose the story of the people that's fine, the real story is the animals." There is no single answer to what it's about! We all come out thinking what we think... I have my version of what I think, but I haven't put it into the play. In Yann's mind there is no definitive answer of what it's about.

What are the key challenges of adapting *Life of Pi*?

One of the main ones is how we stay honorable and give answers in the play, but still allow the

mystical element of religion and of life to live within it, when the audience leaves the theatre. As an individual, I definitely have my view, but it is very individual.

You're an actor as well as a playwright. How does this inform your approach?

For a new piece of work, I'm there from the first moment in rehearsals. I rewrote hugely during the rehearsal process for *Life of Pi*.

I'm really conscious of the actors when I'm writing and I really listen to them in rehearsal. If their instinct is saying that there's something not feeling right then we need to tackle it. The thought between the lines is the most important thing. You need to know what the thought is from one line to the next. If the thought isn't right, you have to shift the line.

A script is never a perfectly formed thing when it arrives in the rehearsal room – there are edits and changes. The actors were incredible in adapting to them, even though some of them were happening late in the rehearsal process as we approached previews. That's the stressful part because until you get it in front of the audience, you don't know what it is! It's a fear that's part of the excitement though – if each individual person is sure of what they're doing, when it gets put together it becomes something new and exciting.

I did some rewrites after Sheffield, but then we were delayed because of the pandemic. That later version was used in rehearsals for London, but I did do a few more small rewrites. The staging was different so the language needed to fit the staging, such as the length of entrances and exits and how much dialogue could be delivered, for example.

What are the other considerations when adapting a novel for stage or screen?

Theatrical interpretation is a very different form to a book. A book is a very personal relationship between you and what you're writing. Yann says, "Pi sits at a table", and whoever is reading will fill in the detail about a table. In film, everyone asks a LOT of questions about what it looks like, it's

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meaning – it needs to have a purpose. In theatre, the table doesn't even need to be there! The way in which we use our imagination is different.

There are some books that I wouldn't know where to start on. With those I do adapt, I have a flavor of character of what they want, what they need and where they're going. It can be relationship to environment, animals, and people: that is the key. If the relationships in the book are rich, that's what grabs me.

This show tells the story in a new way, and brings out things in a new way that you won't necessarily have seen in the book. In the book, the chronology is all over the place and you don't really question it. Your mind leaps, but in the theatre that's quite difficult to do so it becomes a different language.

Were there any particularly difficult scenes to write?

You have to be playful in rehearsal. When I first wrote a draft of when the Tsimstum sank, it was all going on. The scene was far too busy! There were basically various mini scenes going on at the same time. The actors did what I had written, they used tissue boxes, coat hangers, a costume rail, etc. to bring it alive, and there were some bits that were magical. Finn orchestrated some movement, too. Although there was a lot about the scene that didn't work, we found the intention – that's key.

We took elements of it, I rewrote it until we get the sinking of the ship that you see in the show. The scene at the zoo at the beginning was also a big challenge. I wrote and wrote, and it took a long time to get right. None of us could tell why. It's near the opening of the play – it's where the magic and wonder start and the different elements start to combine. It's the high point before we go to sea.

All of the important characters were being introduced, but then Pi is shortly going to lose them so it was difficult to achieve in a short amount of stage time! The arrival on the island is also an important moment and we had to make some quite significant changes to our original plans. Pi is hallucinating because he's so hungry and

traumatized.

My original ideas didn't work and so it's become a monologue now. Pi explains it and the audience has to imagine it for themselves. Perhaps that makes it even more effective: sometimes less can be more!

Can you tell us about the theme of religion in the play?

I loved the religion in the book, because it made me chuckle. In these times it's quite dangerous to laugh at religion but the book is a gentle, affectionate look at what religion does and what it means to people.

I grew up in a Hindu environment. It made complete sense to me as a child that the stories I was told demonstrated good behavior and explored different elements of ourselves.

Do you have a favorite character in the play?

What I really like is the way in which we've made women more prominent in the play. I've taken characters from the novel who are men, or who are in the background, and made them more prominent female characters. I love the representations of lots of different kinds of people in the play. I can't pick a favorite character though!

What do you want the audience to think and feel when they're watching the play?

You follow your own feeling when writing. I have to make sense of my feelings as I follow the story. If I am wanting to create fear, then I explore the fear and ask how the character carries on, how do they carry on? I'm following the emotions in the story. Nobody's response is irrelevant: it's very personal. You're sitting in a room with people, but it's about your response.

I want us all to feel loss when Pi loses his family. Everyone has felt that in some form. By the age of seven we have experienced the full range of human emotions, and as we age they simply become more complex. Anyone seeing the show will have felt those feelings before. That's why stories that are universal and are so relevant to all of us.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH

MAX WEBSTER



MAX WEBSTER (DIRECTOR) is a Tony & Olivier Award nominated director specializing in new work, opera, and live music events. Theatre credits include: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Upcoming, National Theatre); *Macbeth* (Donmar & West End); *Henry V* (Donmar); *Antigone*, *As*

You Like It and Twelfth Night (Regent's Park); *Dr. Seuss' The Lorax* (Old Vic/San Diego Old Globe/Minneapolis Children's Theatre); *The Jungle Book* (Fiery Angel); *Fanny and Alexander*, *Cover My Tracks* (Old Vic); *The Twits* (Leicester Curve); *The Winter's Tale* (Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh); *The Sea of Fertility*, *Mary Stuart* (Parco Tokyo); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Globe); *Orlando*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *My Young and Foolish Heart* (Royal Exchange, Manchester); *James and the Giant Peach*, *My Generation* (Leeds Playhouse). Opera: *La Bohème* (Göteborgsoperan, Sweden) and *The Merry Widow* (ENO).

What are the staging challenges of *Life of Pi*?

Life of Pi is a challenging novel to adapt because of the interpolation of the scenes at sea, with the more conversational scenes in the hospital. We have to ensure that we don't lose momentum and tension in those scenes – that we sustain the audience's engagement and interest.

Yann's novel is an image which is expanded – a boy and a tiger in a boat! The first third is about the family, the epilogue is the second story with the two investigators who talk to Pi, and then the middle is an extended journalistic and scientific description about how Pi survives. It doesn't have the same arc as a theatrical piece, so the challenge is to give the time at sea that vital shape.

My role as a director includes ensuring that the fundamental information and story is clear:

- Where we are – whether that's a zoo, a hospital room, the market, the sea etc. There are a lot of different locations in the story.
- The circumstances of the scene – why we're

there, what's happened before the weather, and temperature, the atmosphere and so on.

- The physical and verbal language – what the characters are doing, and what they are saying, which run parallel to each other.

What was your approach to rehearsing the show?

The first time we made the show, we'd done a lot of Research and Development (R&D) and workshopping. On our first day we did a read through, which I usually do at the beginning of the rehearsal period. Read throughs are good to do both as an ice-breaker, but also a way into discussion, talking about the play and what it means, and the key themes that we think are important. We also did a movement session. We did an introduction to puppetry and talked about the practicalities of working together. We had some principles about how we'd be with each other – including equality, diversity and inclusion.

Working with Finn there was a lot of practical and technical direction as well as the artistic process of telling the story. Each time the puppet does something, it has to be physically 'written': not physically written down, but it needs working out and creating with precision. Everything is collaborative.

What do you want the audience to experience as they watch *Life of Pi*?

Theatre is something that happens between the actors and the audience in a triangulation with the play we're performing. When I'm directing, I constantly consider the relationship with the audience and I don't think it's a one way interaction: it's a shared act of imagination. I've been struck by the different thoughts people have had when they come away from the show and I really like the way they resonate with the story. Some people are very interested in the theology of the play, whilst others see it as an epic story of survival. Art is not didactic. The play means different things to different people. Yann gets asked a lot about which of the stories is 'real', but Yann has said that he wanted to write a very democratic novel – that people have a choice. We want the play to be an emotionally effective story – but again there are various different emotions that you might feel when watching it.

AAPI HERITAGE/HISTORY

ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) HERITAGE/HISTORY

recognizes the rich cultures, histories, and contributions of people with roots in Asia and the Pacific Islands. This diverse group includes ethnicities from East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands, each with unique traditions, languages, and histories.

AAPI communities have shaped societies across the globe, from the ancient civilizations of Asia to the modern-day contributions in science, technology, arts, and politics. Their influence is evident in global trade, cultural exchanges, and the spread of ideas and innovations.

However, these communities have also faced challenges, including colonization, migration, and discrimination.

Celebrating AAPI Heritage means acknowledging these global contributions and understanding the complexities of identity and migration that have shaped the AAPI experience. It also emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and inclusion in fostering a more connected and equitable world.

Key aspects of AAPI culture and things of cultural significance:

Diversity of Ethnicities

AAPI culture is incredibly diverse, encompassing people from East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Each ethnic group within the AAPI community brings its own unique language, traditions, cuisine, and customs.

Family and Respect for Elders

Family plays a central role in many AAPI cultures, with a strong emphasis on filial piety and respect for elders. Multi generational households are common, and family gatherings are important

occasions for maintaining connections and passing down traditions.

Cuisine

AAPI cuisine is celebrated worldwide for its variety and flavors. From Chinese dim sum and Japanese sushi to Indian curries and Filipino adobo, AAPI food reflects the diverse culinary traditions of the region. Food is often a focal point of social gatherings and celebrations.

Arts and Entertainment

AAPI culture has made significant contributions to the arts and entertainment industry. From classical music and traditional dance to contemporary literature and film, AAPI artists have played a vital role in shaping global culture.

Language and Literature

AAPI languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Hindi, and many others, are spoken by millions of people worldwide. Literature in AAPI languages encompasses a wide range of genres, from ancient poetry and folk tales to modern novels and poetry.

Religion and Spirituality

AAPI cultures are influenced by a variety of religious and spiritual beliefs, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, and indigenous faiths. Religious practices often involve rituals, festivals, and ceremonies that are deeply ingrained in cultural identity.

Traditions and Festivals

AAPI cultures celebrate a multitude of festivals and traditions throughout the year. These may include Lunar New Year, Diwali, Songkran, Chuseok, Obon, and many others. Festivals are occasions for community gatherings, feasting, and honoring cultural heritage.

AAPI HERITAGE/HISTORY

Art and Craftsmanship

AAPI cultures have a rich tradition of art and craftsmanship, including calligraphy, pottery, weaving, and martial arts. These traditional arts are often passed down through generations and continue to be practiced and celebrated today.

History and Heritage

AAPI communities have a complex and often overlooked history in the United States, including experiences of immigration, discrimination, and resilience. From the contributions of Chinese railroad workers to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, AAPI history is an integral part of American History.

Activism and Advocacy

AAPI communities have a long history of activism and advocacy for social justice and civil rights. From the fight for immigration reform to campaigns against anti-Asian discrimination, AAPI activists continue to work towards a more equitable society for all.

This breakdown only scratches the surface of AAPI culture and its significance. Each community within the AAPI umbrella has its own unique traditions, histories, and contributions that deserve to be recognized and celebrated.



LIFE OF PI A.R.T. • Sonya Venugopal, Celia Mei Rubin, Hiran Abeysekera • Photo by Matthew Murphy & Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

PUPPETRY IN LIFE OF PI

PUPPETRY TEAM: *Life of Pi* utilizes puppets all the way through the production. We talked to Finn Caldwell (Puppet & Movement Director, and Puppet Designer), Nick Barnes (Puppet Designer), Scarlett Wilderink (Richard Parker – Tiger Heart) and Fred Wild (Tiger Head) to give us an insight into the use of puppetry in the show.

STARTING THE PROCESS

Finn explains, “When we start looking at a show that will use puppets Nick and I will work out what the puppet will need to do in the show, and crucially, how it contributes to the narrative. The puppet must have a strong sense of character”

Richard Parker needs to be scary. In Western performance, puppets don’t tend to be scary, but this puppet needs to communicate a tiger’s strength, weight and power.

He needs to be frightening both for Pi, and for the audience. There are moments where he is relaxed, and there are moments when he is tense and powerful.

There were two periods of research and design (R&D) in which a small team used simple cut out wooden shapes, and experimented with how many people would be needed to operate them, how they should be constructed and what their scale should be.

Designs are created on CAD (Computer Aided Design) and CAM (Computer Aided Manufacturing) software. Puppets are created using a CVC milling machine, a 3D printer and through laser cutting.

CHECK OUT THE VIDEO BELOW:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eewuaLmE8mY>



LIFE OF PI A.R.T. • Richard Parker (Rowan Magee, Celia Mei Rubin, and Nikki Calonge)
Photo by Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

CONSTRUCTION

Nick Barnes explains, “We used Plastozone to construct the puppets. Richard Parker is made to look weather beaten and like driftwood, but the audience will consistently see the form of the tiger. The armatures are made from aluminum, so they’re lightweight, and the joints have bungees which provides resistance and pull the limb back to its starting point after a movement. The puppets are made of laminates of layered plywood and aluminum: they need to be hard wearing, but lightweight.”

The orangutan is more like a traditional Japanese Bunraku puppet with a flexible nylon

rod creating its rib cage. It’s a complicated structure so it needs strength and support. The puppet is operated by three people. The hyena has two people inside it to operate it, whilst the giraffe only needs one operator. The operation of the giraffe is more like object puppetry, whilst Richard Parker and the orangutan are operated by three people and are the most complex puppets in the show.

Both Finn and Nick have backgrounds in performance as well as design. Therefore, they are aware of the many challenges that the puppeteers will face when using the puppets to bring the characters to life.

PUPPETRY IN LIFE OF PI

THE RULES OF PUPPETRY:

Finn says, "The most important thing to remember is that the audience needs to believe the puppet is alive. If that doesn't happen, everything else is lost. Puppets appeal to the audience's sense of play, and there is a silent contract between the audience and the puppeteers to suspend all disbelief. It's the same as two children agreeing to play with a toy. There's an unspoken agreement that the object is alive."

There are seven rules for animating a puppet, but the three most important ones are:

BREATH: Being able to see and hear a puppet breathing allows the audience to believe the animal is taking oxygen. We need to see their lungs inflating and deflating. Breath also tells us about emotions: fast breathing communicates tension or fear, whilst slow breathing tells us the character is relaxed and comfortable.

FOCUS: It needs to be clear what the puppet is looking at – where its eye line is. It needs to be as precise as the way humans observe and focus on things. The audience stops believing in intention and thoughts if the eyeline is not clear. When it's successful, we start to believe in the puppet's thoughts, desires and intentions.

WEIGHT: The body of the puppet is just as important as the spirit and the mind of the puppet character. We need to convince the audience that this constructed object is actually a tiger, for example. The puppeteers must convey muscularity, weight, and gravity.

A specific example of this would be when Richard Parker jumps. The puppeteers could just lift and throw it! However, to help the audience to believe in it we have to include the preparation for the movement (bending or squatting down, for example) before releasing into the air. When an animal lands on a hard surface, the muscles will compensate by bending. Our puppets need to do that too. Its preparation and recovery, as well as the action of being in the air that's important.



LIFE OF PI A.R.T. • Richard Parker (Andrew Wilson, Scarlet Wildernik, Fred Davis) • Photo by Matthew Murphy & Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

PUPPETRY IN PRACTICE

THE PUPPETEER

The majority of the performers in this production operate at least one puppet during the performance. When you are watching the production, consider the following points:

- In the same way that an actor uses their body, a puppeteer does too. Not only do they move the puppet, but they also amplify what the puppet is doing.
- Puppeteers need strong vocal and breath skills. Each animal in *Life of Pi* has its own set of vocalizations, which have been created in rehearsal and based on considerable research. Without breath, the puppet cannot be animated and will not encourage the audience to suspend their disbelief. Where there is more than one operator for each puppet, they all need to coordinate with each other in their breath and sound.
- Successful puppeteering requires a performer to have a responsive body, which is strong and flexible. The performer must use their physical ability to communicate character and story – it is not simply about manipulating an inanimate object.
- It can be helpful for puppeteers to have a background in physicality, whether through acrobatics, dance training or even martial arts – it all helps them understand the precision that’s needed.

All of the jobs in the show are physically difficult – head, heart and hind. 6 puppeteers in the show cover all the puppets. Pretty much every actor in the show does some kind of puppetry.

PERFORMING WITH PUPPETS

Fred Wild says, “We all had to do quite intense weight, endurance and stamina training in order to be able to puppeteer the Tiger effectively. We achieved this with thorough physical warm-ups, wearing ankle, wrist or chest weights while rehearsing, and by just using the puppets for as long as we could bear to in each rehearsal session. It was essential to build the required muscle as early on as possible so as to reduce the chance of injury and to facilitate us to be able to rehearse the show and not have to stop for a rest because of fatigue.”

Scarlett Wilderink continues, “We also have a physiotherapist as part of the production team who works with us, focusing on prevention – stopping injuries before they happen. Our physio also works with a nutritionist so it really is a holistic approach to us keeping well and safe.”



LIFE OF PI UK & Ireland Tour • EK Rebecca Killick, Elan James as OJ and company • Photo by Ellie Kurtz

PUPPETRY IN PRACTICE

PUPPETRY TOOLKIT

BY NICK BARNES

Choice of Materials

The choice of materials you use for your puppets will be the result of three factors: the size of the puppet, the look of the puppet and your budget. From these three considerations a list of factors becomes important: weight, movement, robustness, aesthetics, durability, cost.

Think of a traditional stringed marionette puppet.

Most likely it will have been carved from wood. If the puppet is small then the weight of the wood will not be an issue for the puppeteer, it will more probably aid in its operation, as a marionette relies on gravity for its movement. The size will likely mean that the cost of materials will be less. If you are building a large walkabout puppet supported on a backpack, wood will almost certainly be too heavy to carve body parts, and for reasons of weight and cost you may want to use bamboo, withies and tissue paper – less expensive materials for the size of the puppet. If you have a bigger budget, you might consider using plastazote.

Remember also that natural materials can be a more environmentally friendly way to go. Check that wood has come from a responsible source. As a designer part of your role is to be conscious and thoughtful, about both aesthetics and process. It is also important to think about what happens once the puppet has fulfilled its role- will it be stored complete or dismantled, or will it be recycled or scrapped?

Puppet Design

Puppets are performance objects, whether for theatre, film, TV, events, or any other purpose and there are puppet traditions in most cultures around the world. How a puppet looks varies from hyper-realism to highly abstracted depending on the project.

Puppets for theatre usually benefit from some level of abstraction. A theatre audience enjoys

being asked to use their imagination and to fill in the gaps when a puppet is not completely realistic to look at. They are often at their best if the way they look adds to the story or themes of a production and the overall design of the show. We don't mind seeing the puppeteers or the mechanics of the puppet if the direction and design support this.

Equally there can often be practical or economic factors you must work around when designing. Perhaps you only have one puppeteer for an animal which has four legs and needs to bound realistically around the stage. Maybe your budget is too small for the number of puppets in the production. These factors need not result in a negative impact on the design. Often the more restricted you are, the more creative and interesting the result. If you can make a bird only using spoons, it's going to take some figuring out, but the result will be something that looks both like a bird and like a bunch of spoons, which excites our imagination.

First Steps

Begin your design with a concept drawing of the puppet which captures its character and aesthetic. From this create a profile drawing of the puppet (ideally 1:1 scale) and a side view drawing. This will enable you to work out the internal structure (armature) and body shapes.

Remember though, design is not all done on paper, much of your puppet will be figured out by trying ideas in 3D, so test ideas by making prototypes. Keep handling these, and where possible ask a puppeteer to test what you have made.

Use feedback to make the puppet work better and be prepared to cut bits away, shorten or lengthen parts, make changes to shapes or mechanisms. You may make something which looks beautiful, but if it can't fulfill its role in the show for which it is designed it is not going to be a good puppet!

Continued on next page

PUPPETRY IN PRACTICE

PUPPETRY TOOLKIT BY NICK BARNES

Designing with CAD

Learning how to use a computer to help with design is potentially a worthwhile endeavor and as you get more proficient and move on to bigger projects it can help speed up making, is more precise for mechanical applications, and can make repeatable tasks and future modification easier. Used in conjunction with CNC milling machines, 3D printers and laser cutters, it offers many creative possibilities. There is free software available for most CAD applications, and some paid-for packages will offer free student versions. Fusion 360 from Autodesk is an excellent product design software package which has a free version for students and lends itself well to puppet design.

Movement

No matter how good your puppet looks, if it doesn't move well it will struggle to fulfill its purpose. In almost every case movement trumps aesthetics. If it moves well it is going to live in the minds of you audience far more than if it simply looks good but moves awkwardly. Always consider the puppeteer(s) as part of your tool kit and give them as much responsibility to bring your creation to life as you give your materials. If you use them well, they will take your inanimate object, and make it incredible. Consider how they will move will take up space. The interface between puppet and puppeteers is usually handles. Design these to be comfortable and to help the puppeteer be in control without being too bulky or pronounced. Handles should be built strongly and connect soundly with the parts of the puppet they control.

SHADOW PUPPETRY:

- Research Indonesian shadow puppetry. You will find beautiful puppet designs and performances which are created using screens, and well-defined, jointed figures on rods.
- Create your puppets by finding clear outlines of the animals in *Life of Pi*. Cut them out on stiff cardboard. You will see that the ornate Indonesian puppets are very intricate – this might come later as you learn the basic skills of shadow puppetry.
- Your puppets should have jointed limbs – these can be created using split pins – and need to be mounted on rods (you can use wooden skewers, pencils, chopsticks or other thin rods).
- Use a sheet or thick gauze, and light it from behind with theatre lights, desk lamps or flashlights. Be careful that your sheet does not touch the lamps. Your teacher may also provide you with a special spray which helps fire-proof fabrics and other materials.
- Once you have created your different shadow puppets, storyboard the images that you wish your audience to see. Remember that in shadow puppetry it is easy to overcrowd your 'screen' so be clear about the key moment in each scene.
- Once you've choreographed your puppetry, you can experiment with sound effects, soundscapes and music to create mood, atmosphere and emotion for your performance.

If you're working with a class or a club to make puppets, consider investing in the following items:

- Masking tape
- Newspaper
- Brown paper – you can buy it in rolls which is often cheaper than smaller packets
- Googly eyes
- Split Pins to help create joints
- Pipe cleaners
- Glue
- String
- Wire

You can also collect:

- Cereal boxes and other pieces of cardboard
- Wooden skewers, chopsticks or thin cane
- Clean milk cartons of different sizes
- Yogurt containers
- Clean soft toys
- Hooded sweatshirts

PUPPETRY IN PRACTICE

Puppetry is the process of animating an inanimate object. You can therefore create fantastic effects with everyday objects such as books, shoes, toys, pieces of clothing and even pieces of paper. The most important thing is to commit to making the object live.

OBJECT PUPPETRY: FLOCKS OF BIRDS

Find a mixture of books – hardback, paper back, notebooks, various different colors and sizes etc. Open a book near its center point and try to simulate the flapping of bird wings through manipulating the book. Your audience will know that it is not really a bird, but audiences enjoy the abstraction of using one object to represent something else. Working individually, experiment with creating a ‘flight path’ for your bird. Consider what type of bird you are trying to create. Is it a delicate one, or a strong and intimidating bird of prey?

Once you have done this, find some videos showing bird murmuration – where they fly in large groups and create shapes in the sky. It can be a very beautiful sight.

Once you have noted the movement patterns, and chosen one you wish to try and create through puppetry, work in a group of up to 10 people to create a murmuration with your book puppets. Who leads? Do they lead all the time? How will you use levels? When and how will you change direction? Remember that you will also need to work closely with your ensemble to agree where the eye gaze should go, and what vocalizations might be needed.

OBJECT PUPPETRY: HOODIE PUPPETS

Find a normal hooded sweatshirt. You are going to create a puppet of a child using this piece of clothing. The arms are already formed: you could knot the cuffs to create ‘hands’. The hood can be scrunched or folded to create a head that matches the scale of the puppet you want to create. To create the legs, hold the two outer corners of the bottom of the hoodie. Twist both corners away from each other so that they start to create ‘legs’. Keep twisting until the bottom half of the hoodie forms legs that are in proportion to the arms and head you have created.

Depending on the size of the hoodie, you will need from three to five people to operate the puppet. Using the three principles outlined earlier, can you:

- Make the puppet breathe? Where does the tension and movement need to be? Do you need sound to make it more convincing?
- Make the puppet walk? Watch one of your group members walk across the room, and note how opposition works (we swing our right arm forward as we walk on our left leg, for example). Note how feet make contact with the ground. How should the ensemble member’s co-ordinate their movements so that the audience focus is on the puppet at all times? Make sure your puppet doesn’t start floating, rather than walking!
- Create a short sequence of action? For example, introduce a ball in to the sequence (either a real one, such as a tennis ball, or a scrunched up piece of paper).
- Create an interaction between two puppets. What happens if you add a second hoodie figure? How do you need to collaborate to ensure that the puppets are equally convincing, and which one we need to watch at any given moment during their interaction?

Remember that in *Life of Pi* rehearsals, puppeteers work together for significant lengths of time. They learn to anticipate each other’s movements. It will take time for you to develop those skills so rehearse with purpose and use the three main principles to keep you focused as you refine your work.

CREATIVE PRACTICE & CAREERS

PUTTING ON A PRODUCTION

Staging a production is a complex undertaking and involves a large number of production and design roles including, but not limited to:

- Puppetry
- Set and Costume
- Lighting
- Sound and Music
- Video and Projection

In this single moment from Life of Pi below, each of these elements combine to create a clear and cohesive design effect.

Looking at this image, consider the following questions:

- Can you see the puppeteers? Do you focus on them or the puppets? Why?
- What elements of the set design can you see? The backdrop? The boat? The revolve?
- What colors are being used in the costume? What effect does this have?
- What colors are being used in the lighting? Where are the lights focused?
- Can you recall the sound effects and/or music being used at this time?
- What does the video projection add to the design concept for this moment in the play?



LIFE OF PI UK & Ireland Tour • Divesh Subaskaran and Richard Parker puppeteers • Photo by Ellie Kurtz

CREATIVE PRACTICE & CAREERS



LIFE OF PI A.R.T. Hiran Abeysekera, Richard Parker (Fred Davis, Scarlet Wilderink, Andrew Wilson)
Photo by Matthew Murphy & Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

SET DESIGN:

The set in *Life of Pi* constantly transforms to represent different places and times. Set design can be brought to life realistically or represented through items that symbolize or signify an actual thing. Set design defines a space and focuses the audience's attention. A set design process consists of many moving parts and contributing individuals. It is possible to outline this work as falling within four key areas:

1. Creating the design brief
2. Planning and adapting ideas and systems to bring the opportunities to life
3. Presenting the overall concept and evaluating the final design
4. Realizing and reflecting on the design in practice from production of materials to technical rehearsals

Life of Pi Profile: Tim Hatley – Set and Costume Designer

From the age of 7, Tim had wanted to work in theatre, and was endlessly making things, inspired by programs like *Blue Peter*. Up until the age of 15, Tim wanted to be an actor, but then he saw Richard Eyre's production of *Guys and Dolls* at the National Theatre. He noticed the role and importance of lighting designers. He eventually studied Theatre Design at Central St Martins. He went on to assist designers such as Bob Crowley, Alison Chitty and Jocelyn Herbert before working on productions as designer for institutions such as the National Theatre, Opera North and Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

CREATIVE PRACTICE & CAREERS

COSTUME DESIGN:

Costume can lend a sense of time and place to a production, but it can also affect the way an audience feels about a scene, situation or person. Color can send strong messages to us. We can associate them with feelings, with times of the year. Cold, gray colors can make us feel detached, whereas warm and rich tones can draw us in toward the wearer.

Color psychology can be utilized to understand how we use color to communicate atmosphere and feeling. Red is known to signal danger or warmth. Autumnal colors can make us think of the natural world, white makes us think of innocence and gray tones can make things feel otherworldly, lacking emotion, remote or ghostly. Similarly, the texture of the fabric used can give signals and signs to the audience about the character. Clothes can tell us a lot about a person's age, status, wealth, job, cultural, location and time in history. Costume design must align with the overall vision for the design concept.

"Help from school is very important: I was very lucky to have a very supportive art teacher. If you aspire to be a designer, allow that passion to come to the fore. Doing an art foundation course is an important opportunity to learn about yourself as an artist. You also learn a lot by simply looking. Working as a designer demands total commitment. It's important to find the right course, and work with the right people." - Tim Hatley

LIGHTING:

Just as a set can transport us to different places and times, and costume can give symbolize or signify meaning and feeling, lighting design can build the world of the story through color, intensity and texture. Light and darkness can signal the time of day and the time of year. Lighting design can create mood and atmosphere and it can focus the audience's attention. A design will seek to light the performers, but also the set design, giving depth and dimension to the performance space. The design may also include or darken the audience space.

Lighting for performances can be very complicated and involve hundreds or even thousands of cues and states. There has been a lot of technological advances in lighting design and health and safety is a key element in the build and design of a lighting rig and design. Light can be filtered and focused so it is more or less intense and we can adjust the brightness. The 'angle at which we place the light to the object it is focused on can change how the light and the subsequent shadows it creates is seen.

Different types of instruments are used for each of these jobs and they each create different effects. Instruments used to create specific effects beyond contributing to the general lighting effect are called specials. Moving lights can also create incredible effects.

Life of Pi Profile: Tim Lutkin – Lighting Designer

Tim was involved in school productions where he operated the lighting desk. At the age of 16 he got a job at Hull New Theatre, operating the follow spot. He went on to study at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and then assisted Hugh Vanstone, another high-profile lighting designer, before becoming a lighting designer working on an international scale.

"See as many shows as possible and try to decipher what systems they are using. Remember what you liked and let that guide you in your own ideas and designs."

CREATIVE PRACTICE & CAREERS

SOUND & MUSIC DESIGN:

Sound design forms a crucial part of creating the world of a play. As with set, costume and lighting design, sound and music, or audio can develop an audience's understanding of time and location, can establish a sense of the cultural world of the setting and can create mood and atmosphere, enhancing the action of the play's narrative. Sound, music, and not to forget purposeful moments of silence, can also develop a story beyond the action seen onstage.

Just like film scores, theatrical scores, soundscapes and incidental music can define moments, amplify the drama, elevate the tension or establish a sense of love, loss or relief. With both sound design and music scores, live or digitally recorded moments can be utilized to great effect, using naturally occurring sounds, voices, lyrics or electronically created sounds.

Life of Pi Profile: Andrew T. Mackay – Composer

Andrew began playing the piano aged 12, citing his teachers for inspiring him. He also had a band during his school days. He then attended the Royal College of Music, taught by Dr Lloyd Webber and John McCabe. Andrew composes for both live orchestras and using technology – both of which are important in his work as a composer. *Life of Pi* is his first composition for theatre but has previously worked in short films and feature films. He is particularly interested in how music aids storytelling, which isn't necessarily explicitly taught at music school.

“For this type of work, you have to be 100% committed. Nothing less will do! You need a vision, and today's technology can help you make your own music. Technology, and what we have learned in the pandemic, means that the world of making music has become even smaller and easier to navigate, so go for it!”



Scan this QR Code
to access the
Life of Pi Soundtrack

VIDEO AND PRODUCTION DESIGN:

Projection and video design can play a major role in creating a defined sense of space, location and atmosphere. This area of theatrical design is certainly not new but has grown in use significantly in recent years.

This field of design looks to the creation of digital graphics, animations, film and live feeds and integrates it with live action onstage through projection, LED walls and monitors. The video designer will work very closely with the set, lighting and sound designers to co-create a cohesive design concept.

Life of Pi Profile: Andrzej Goulding – Video and Projection Designer

At primary school, Andrzej was interested in a variety of subjects such as maths, science and history, and he kept up that interest at secondary school. As well as developing his art skills, he remained very interested in physics in particular, and still listens to the Royal Institution lectures every year! He studied Art, and Design Technology at A level, and then studied at Central St Martins, first completing a foundation course and then a degree in Theatre Design.

“There is no easy way up in this industry. You need to make sure that you can forge relationships with people. Remember that in design, there is no right or wrong: if there was, there wouldn't be so many different productions of Shakespeare plays! Be willing to experiment with ideas and make sure you're having fun. If the process isn't fun, it will show on stage. And remember: never be late and always be reliable!”

EXPLORING STAGE ELEMENTS

REFLECTIONS ON PUPPETRY, COSTUME DESIGN, VIDEO PROJECTION:

Using the image below from the production as a spark, consider the following...

- How does the relationship between Pi and the tiger change based on how the tiger moves or interacts with him
- What skills do you think the puppeteers need to bring the tiger and other animals to life on stage?
- What might the designers consider when dressing the puppeteers to either blend into the background or stand out?
- How do Pi's costumes reflect his transformation over the course of the story?
- In what ways can projections enhance the emotional tone of key scenes, such as storms or moments of stillness?
- How do projections contribute to the transitions between Pi's memories, dreams, and reality?



LIFE OF PI UK & Ireland Tour
Hiran Abeysekera and Richard Parker puppeteers
Photo by Ellie Kurtz

EXPLORING STAGE ELEMENTS



REFLECTIONS ON SOUND & MUSIC, SET & COSTUME DESIGN, LIGHTING:

Using the image above from the production as a spark, consider the following...

- In what ways might the set design incorporate illusions to create a sense of vastness or isolation?
- How does the set transform throughout the story, and what does that suggest about Pi's journey?
- What role does music play in conveying Pi's emotional journey throughout the story?
- How could sound effects, like the creaking of the lifeboat or animal sounds, enhance the realism of the play?
- In what ways might sound transitions help the audience move between Pi's memories, dreams, and reality?
- How do the costumes help establish the cultural and time-period context of the play?
- How might the use of simple or exaggerated crowd costumes help communicate the variety of people Pi encounters in his journey?

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

Ask students to review these thematic references from the play and then answer the questions. These themes can be used individually to inspire classroom discussion or collectively.

Resilience

Pi spends eight months at sea and is determined to survive. He is also determined to challenge the preconceptions and assumptions made by Mr Okamoto in the hospital room in Mexico.

Mamaji prays that "may these challenging times make us stronger". As he starts to experience visions, Pi sees Mrs Biology Kumar who tells him, "Use logic and maths, Pi, use everything you have and defy the odds". Although he is no longer surrounded by his family, Pi uses what they have taught him in his bid to survive.

Mr Okamoto closes the play with the words, "This is an astounding story of courage and endurance in the face of unimaginable difficulty..."

- How does Pi use logic and the lessons he learned from his family to survive the hardships at sea?
- What is one personal challenge you've faced where you had to push through difficulties to succeed?

Family

In order for us to understand the weight of Pi's grief, we need to see the family interact before the *Tsimtsum* sinks. Amma is very strongly associated with home, as Pi's father tells him "Amma is making home away from home" when they board the *Tsimtsum*, and she also brings a Tiffin tin of food to help sustain them. Pi has a typically fractious relationship with his sister but the love and loyalty between them is very clear.

- How does Pi's connection to his family impact his actions and emotional journey after the shipwreck?
- What traditions or memories from your family bring you comfort during difficult times?

Grief

When we first meet Pi in the hospital room, he is clearly deeply traumatized by the loss of his family. It is difficult to reconcile Mr Okamoto's constant questioning with Pi's need to recover from the trauma he has experienced. We might also consider the pairings between the animals and the humans in the story. One interpretation is that Pi uses the animals in order to process what has happened – as a method of understanding the extreme circumstances in which he and his family found themselves.

- How does the play depict Pi's grief, and how does it influence his interaction with Mr. Okamoto in the hospital?
- How do you process loss or disappointment in your life?

Human Survival Instinct

Father tells Pi, "Don't think any animal is harmless. Life will defend itself no matter how small it is. This world is dangerous. It's a mistake to be complacent." Mamaji is teaching Pi to swim, and this becomes a metaphor for his ability to survive. Shortly before they leave for Canada, Mamaji tells Pi, "not too much thinking, just keep moving forward" and that Pi must "conquer open water". We might assume that this is foreshadows Pi's need to cling to life, and deal with the trauma and loss that he endures along the way.

- How does the advice Pi received from his father and Mamaji prepare him for survival in extreme conditions?
- When have you had to rely on quick thinking or instincts to handle a tough situation?

Reality vs. Fantasy

Towards the end of the play, Mr Okamoto expresses disbelief at Pi's ability to survive in a lifeboat with a tiger. Pi tells him, "Life is hard to believe. God is hard to believe...I applied reason and logic at every moment. But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bath water." Here the two characters

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

are struggling to understand each other's perspectives.

It is up to the audience to consider what they believe in, and what they believe truly happened during Pi's time at sea. Yann Martel and Lolita Chakrabati both wish us to consider our relationship with truth and with fantasy. When Mr Okamoto tells Pi, "A story has an element of invention. We don't want invention. We want facts" Pi responds, "You want a story that confirms what you already know. You want dry, yeast-less factuality. A story without animals." However, the audience is never told which version to believe.

- Why do you think Pi chooses to tell two different versions of his story, and what does this say about how humans cope with trauma?
- Do you think it's ever helpful to imagine or "invent" stories to make sense of life's challenges? Why or why not?

Individuality

Pi is only 17 years old, and yet is self-assured when he interacts with Mr Okamoto. Pi tells him, "We're all children, Mr Okamoto". When Mr Okamoto becomes frustrated that Pi will not, or cannot, provide the information he requires, Pi retorts, "If these are not the answers you want Mr Okamoto, then you must ask different questions". Pi is keen to assert his own beliefs, despite his vulnerability and trauma.

- How does Pi assert his individuality in his interactions with Mr. Okamoto, despite his vulnerable circumstances?
- What is a moment where you stood firm in your beliefs, even when others questioned you?

Morality

There are two parallel stories in *Life of Pi*, one with animals, and one without. Although Yann Martel and Lolita Chakrabati are keen for the audience to create their own interpretations, the concept of who gets to take the life of another being (animal or otherwise) is key to the story. One interpretation is that Richard Parker is a parallel character to Pi, who must take drastic

action to survive and to avenge the murder of his loved ones (Orangutan representing his mother, for example).

- How does Pi wrestle with the moral implications of his actions for survival? Do you agree with his choices?
- Have you ever faced a situation where doing the "right thing" was complicated? How did you handle it?

Civilization

When he is forced to eat the turtle, Pi is conflicted. Commander Grant Jones tells him, "Never forget above all you are a gentleman. Civilization is the only thing that separates man from beast. Remember the definition of a gentleman is he who uses a butter knife even when dining alone."

Throughout the story, Pi is forced to make decisions that would be considered uncivilized, or even morally wrong, and one interpretation of the story is that Pi must invent the animals to distance himself from those actions that he finds abhorrent, despite the fact that he had no option if he were to survive.

- How does the play explore the tension between Pi's survival instincts and the idea of being a "civilized" person?
- What does being "civilized" mean to you, and how do you balance this with following your instincts?

Migration

Pi and his family board the *Tsimtsum* in order to travel to Canada. They are leaving India because of the political tensions which make it dangerous and unpredictable to live there any longer.

- How does the family's decision to migrate to Canada set the stage for Pi's journey and its themes?
- Have you or someone you know ever moved to a new place? How did that experience change you or them?

LANGUAGE ARTS

CREATIVE WRITING: “The ship sank”

Yann Martel highlights that in his novel, the sinking of the Tsimtsum is communicated in just three words: “The ship sank.” Although there is a brief description of the immediate aftermath, the narrative swiftly moves on to Pi.

In the film and theatre version, the storytelling requires the sinking of the ship to be presented in a visual way. Martel comments that the film version of *Life of Pi* depicts the sinking in a richly visual, extended and very dramatic scene.

YOUR TASK: *In exactly 100 words, write a prose description of the ship sinking that could easily be turned into a film or theatre scene. Focus on using strong visual imagery in your writing, and aim to use at least three of the following techniques:*

- Alliteration
- Parallelism
- Simile or metaphor
- Personification
- Onomatopoeia
- Anaphora
- Epistrophe
- Focus on the five senses

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 3, 4, 5 • Reading 9-12: 4 • Language 9-12: 1, 3 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 4, 6

CREATIVE WRITING: Describing Richard Parker

In the novel, Pi describes Richard Parker in great detail. Yann Martel considered this an easy passage of description to write, because most people are familiar with the basic appearance of a tiger and therefore he did not have to “work too hard” to create a convincing description of the tiger. Tigers all have unique faces, and Martel compares their appearance to the beautiful make up worn in traditional Chinese theatre. The puppet of Richard Parker is similarly crafted in fine detail as interpreted by the puppet makers. This attention to descriptive detail is important in writing

YOUR TASK: *Choose an animal—either a domestic, wild, exotic, or rare species—and write a detailed description of it, just as Yann Martel described Richard Parker. You may need to research your animal to include accurate and specific details about its appearance, habitat, and unique traits. Use rich, descriptive language and sensory details to bring the animal to life for your reader. Incorporate similes, metaphors, or other figurative language to make your description more vivid and engaging, aiming for at least 150 words. If you’d like, you can also imagine your animal as a character in a story or play and describe its personality or “stage presence.” Before submitting, proofread your work for clarity, grammar, and effective word choice. Share your work with classmates.*

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 2, 3, 4, 7 • Reading 9-12: 3, 5 • Language 9-12: 3, 5 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 4, 6

LANGUAGE ARTS

PERSONAL WRITING:

“The shipping clerk mixed up the hunter’s name with the tiger’s name”

Pi’s full name is Piscine Molitor Patel.

Piscine is French for swimming pool and Pi is named after “the finest swimming pool in Paris.” He shortens his name to Pi, which is also a word with mathematical connotations.

YOUR TASK: In a short personal journal entry answer the following questions: What does your name mean, and why were you given that name? Does it have cultural significance, for example, or is it a name that is passed down through your family? How have nicknames been created for you or members of your family? Why do you think names are important? Share your work with classmates!

CCSS Writing 9-12: 3, 4, 10 • Language 9-12: 1, 5 •
Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING:

“A story has an element of invention. We don’t want invention, we want facts”.

In *Life of Pi* Father says, “Man is the most dangerous animal in the zoo.”

YOUR TASK: Write an article for a newspaper which argues that man is more dangerous than any animal. Share your argument with classmates & discuss.

You should pay close attention to form, audience and purpose, and ensure that you plan your answer before you start writing. You might like to think about:

- Humans and their impact on the environment (the planet and/or endangered species)
- Humans and their ability to commit crime
- Whether our obsession with progress and technology is doing more harm than good

CCSS Writing 9-12: 1, 4, 5, 7 • Language 9-12: 1, 2 •
Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1



LIFE OF PI West End • Hiran Abeysekera and Richard Parker puppeteers • Photo by Johan Persson

THEATER ARTS

PHYSICALIZING CHARACTER: Creating the Animals

In the early days of the Research and Development (R&D) process it wasn't always a given that the animals would be represented by puppets. Director Max Webster says, "anything is stageable. I think it would be incredibly exciting to explore different ways to create those characters on stage"

Research & Development

Choose one of the key animals from *Life of Pi* (e.g., the tiger, goat, giraffe, zebra, hyena, or orangutan) and research its physical traits, movements, and vocalizations. Watch wildlife videos, listen to animal sounds, and study photos to understand how the animal moves and communicates. Use your body to physically embody the animal, focusing on its unique movement patterns and posture. Work individually or with a partner to create a series of physical sequences that express the animal's behavior, refining the movements through improvisation. As you develop your character, think about how to communicate the essence of the animal through body language and facial expressions.

Incorporating Sound

In addition to physical movement, research the sounds the animal makes and practice vocalizing them. Focus on recreating key sounds like growls, purrs, or grunts, and experiment with how you can use your breath and voice to express these. Once you're comfortable with both the physical and vocal elements, combine them in a sequence. Try working with a partner where one focuses on the physicality while the other creates the sounds. Reflect on how this collaborative approach influences the overall performance and enhances your portrayal of the animal. Remember to be bold and creative, using your imagination to bring the animal to life on stage.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS - Theatre: Creating, Performing, Responding, Connecting

VISUAL STORYTELLING: Crafting Tableau

Students will analyze key moments from the play, collaborate to create frozen scenes that capture its themes and emotions, and develop skills in nonverbal storytelling and ensemble work. The lesson begins with a brief discussion on the central themes of *Life of Pi*—such as survival, storytelling, and the interaction between reality and imagination—followed by warm-up exercises to build focus and group awareness. Students will practice mirroring movements and striking poses to embody emotions like fear, joy, and determination.

Next, students will be divided into small groups and assigned key moments from the play (e.g., the shipwreck, Pi taming Richard Parker). Groups will brainstorm and rehearse 3–5 frozen images that capture their moment, using levels, spacing, and symbolic gestures to tell the story. Afterward, groups will present their tableaux to the class for feedback, focusing on how effectively their images convey emotion and narrative.

Finally, students will refine their tableaux, adding details like facial expressions and props, and will create a short narration or soundscape to accompany their scene. Each group will perform their final tableau for the class, and the lesson will conclude with a brief discussion reflecting on the process and the role of tableau in storytelling.

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THE PRODUCTION WEB

OFFICIAL BROADWAY SITE: <https://lifeofpibway.com/>

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/LifeOfPiBway/>

INSTAGRAM: <https://www.instagram.com/lifeofpibway/>

X: <https://twitter.com/lifeofpibway>

TIKTOK: <https://www.tiktok.com/@lifeofpibway>