



Life of Pi

Enrichment Guide

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Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Inninewak, Anishinewak, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player/gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is **never** allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre or block the view of those behind you. Please do not wear strong scents like perfume or body spray. We thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

About the Creators

Yann Martel wrote the novel *Life of Pi*. He is a francophone Canadian writer who writes in English, born in 1963 in Salamanca, Spain. His parents are French Canadian and the family lived in several different locations due to their jobs with the Canadian Foreign Services. Martel discovered his love of writing when he studied philosophy at Trent University in Ontario.

Martel 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. He has also won the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature and a Coventry Inspiration Book Award. and was made a Companion of the Order of Canada in 2021.



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*. *Son of Nobody*, a novel about the Trojan War, will be published in 2026. He lives in Saskatoon.

Lolita Chakrabarti adapted the novel into a script. Lolita Chakrabarti OBE is an award-winning actress and playwright who has worked on stage and screen for over 35 years. She trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and now sits on their board. She is a member of the Order of the British Empire, awarded for valuable contributions in fields such as science, public service, and the arts.



Her debut play *Red Velvet* opened at the Tricycle Theatre before transferring to New York and then London's West End. It was nominated for nine major awards, of which it won three. Chakrabarti's adaptation of *Life of Pi* premiered in Sheffield in 2019. It was nominated for 9 Olivier Awards, winning 5 including Best New Play. Chakrabarti also won numerous other accolades including a WhatsOnStage Award, UK Theatre Award and CAMEO Award. It then came to the US, opening in Boston in 2022 and on Broadway in 2023, garnering countless nominations in the US including 3 Tony Awards. The production toured the UK and internationally. (The version you are seeing here at MTC is a completely new production of Chakrabarti's script.)

Chakrabarti's other plays are *Hamnet*; *Hymn*; *Red Velvet*; *Invisible Cities*; *The Greatest Wealth*; *Sylvia*; *Message in a Bottle*. Her acting credits include *The Hunt* (St Ann's Warehouse); *Screw* (CH4); *Vigil* (BBC1); *Showtrial* (BBC1); *Wheel of Time* (Amazon); *Hamlet* (directed by Kenneth Branagh at RADA); *A Casual Vacancy* (BBC1/HBO); *Criminal* (Netflix); and *Delicious* (Sky One).

Related Resource Links: Read an [interview with Yann Martel about the book and its adaptation](#), an [essay by Martel](#) that originally appeared in the Sunday Times, and a [conversation with Lolita Chakrabarti about adaptation](#), bringing the novel to life onstage.

Characters and Setting

PISCINE MOLITOR PATEL, known as Pi, grew up in Pondicherry, India and is emigrating to Canada with his family and animals from his father's zoo. A clever and curious teenager, asking questions of the world around him.

AMMA is Pi's mother. She is Indian, from Pondicherry, devoted to her Hinduism. She is a loving mother, with children whom she adores but also keeps in check.

FATHER is from Pondicherry and dreamed of being a circus ringmaster but has happily settled to own a zoo. He is instinctive, passionate and secular.

RANI is Pi's sister. In her late teens, she clever, sharp, funny, witty and keeps her brother in check. A fierce young woman with a bright future.

MAMAJI is uncle to Pi. Affectionate, loving, a bit of a joker. He is married to Mrs Biology Kumar. A Hindu who conducts puja, a fantastic swimmer who runs clubs for swimming. He is a loving, solid presence in Pi's life.

MRS BIOLOGY KUMAR is a warm and independent woman of science, a teacher who loves the natural world. She is married to Mamaji. She is a strong voice with clear political opinions and compares the animal world to the human one.

PANDIT-JI is a Hindu priest who lives and breathes his vocation. He is trying to persuade Pi to be more Hindu. He does not take kindly to other religions.

ZAIDA KHAN is a dedicated Muslim. She is clear minded about her own beliefs and judgmental of others.

FATHER MARTIN. A Christian priest who is certain of his faith and trying to persuade Pi to join his church. He is benign.

CAPTAIN East/Southeast Asian. They are in charge.

RUSSIAN SAILOR. Speaks Russian only. Befriends Pi on the ship and survives on the lifeboat with a broken leg.

COOK. A looming presence, angry, quick to react against people. He works on the Tsimtsum but believes he is better than that. He is determined to survive the shipwreck and do anything that requires. He is ruthless.

ADMIRAL. An American Navy Officer from the 1940's. He is precise, definitive, no nonsense and does not listen. He instructs Pi and says the unthinkable.

MRS OKAMOTO. She is a senior member of a Japanese shipping corporation insurance team come to investigate the sinking of a Japanese ship. Serious and practical.

LULU is a Canadian official in the embassy in Mexico. She has travelled from Mexico City and is charged with managing the humorless Mr. Okamoto. She is young and ambitious and open to having her opinion changed.

The animals (portrayed by puppets):

Richard Parker (a Royal Bengal Tiger)

Black 'n' White (a Zebra)

Orange Juice (an Orangutan)

Baby Orangutan

Buckingham (a Goat)

Rat

Hyena

Turtle

Meerkats

Giraffe

Life of Pi takes place from 1976-78 in Pondicherry, India; Tomatlán, Mexico; and the Pacific Ocean.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

No strong language or sexual content. Stylized violence and scenes of simulated animal ferocity. Depiction of animal deaths. Emotionally intense story; potentially distressing content including death of family members, a committed vegetarian forced to kill animals in order to survive which he finds deeply upsetting, and themes of grief and trauma.

Possible haze or fog, flashing lights, loud sounds.

Plot Summary

When presented with the opportunity to relocate to Canada following civil unrest in their community, Pi and his family gather the animals from their spectacular Pondicherry Zoo. Traveling aboard a cargo ship on the Pacific Ocean, tragedy strikes and a shipwreck strands Pi on a lifeboat alone – save for a small surviving menagerie of animals, including a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. As the company on the lifeboat rapidly dwindles and days turn into weeks, Pi and Richard Parker learn to coexist and fight for survival. Staying alive in a vast and unforgiving ocean is no easy feat, and Pi is forced to confront the limits of faith, resilience, and his own perception of the world around him.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers. It was written by Hailley Rhoda.

A nurse enters a seemingly empty Mexican hospital room. Pi is hiding under his bed. The nurse brings in Lola from the Canadian embassy and Mrs. Okamoto, who have come to question him about the sinking of the boat he was travelling to Canada on. Pi turns the conversation to faith rather than logistics. He agrees to tell them his story as he thinks it will make them believers.

Pi's story begins back home in the Pondicherry zoo with his family and their goat, Buckingham. Pi banters with his sister Rani. His father rushes through, concerned about the zoo animals. His mother appears with bananas for the orangutan, Orange Juice, who has just given birth. Pi's Auntie Mrs. Biology Kumar and Mamaji come to the zoo for the blessing in thanks for the arrival of the new tiger, strangely named Richard Parker. Pi's father mentions that the political unrest has been leading to people mistreating the zoo animals. He fears for the family if they don't leave India soon. Pi is too casual around the new tiger, so his father demonstrates how dangerous animals are by feeding Buckingham to him and forcing Pi to watch-reminding Pi that animals are wild creatures at their core. Pi is traumatized and hates Richard Parker for his violent nature.

At the market in Pondicherry, the mosque, temple, and church are side by side. Pi speaks first to the priest, then to pandit-ji then to Zaida Kahn about the rage he feels towards Richard Parker. Rani, Amma and his father join him with their shopping. They discover that Pi has been attending all three religious institutes. The holy leaders get jealous and tell him he must choose one faith to follow. Pi asks, why he can't believe all 3?

Pi's father has received word that at last one of their visa applications has been approved and the family rushes home to pack.

The family arrives at a busy cargo ship. Russian and Japanese sailors hurriedly load the zoo animals and the family onto the boat. Father separates from the family to ensure the animals are settled

properly, and Mamaji comes to say goodbye. The ship sets off and Amma does her best to get food sorted even with the rude and dismissive ship's cook.

The journey goes smoothly for 4 days.

While Pi is speaking to the sailors, the weather changes and a storm rises. The family notices water seeping into their cabin. The storm worsens. Orange Juice the orangutan has somehow freed herself and Father goes to calm her. Suddenly the hyena also appears on deck. Rani and Father rush below deck to capture the animals. The sailors rush to put on life vests and lower the lifeboats. Pi is separated from his mother in the chaos, and the sailors force him overboard to evacuate.

Back in the present in Pi's hospital room, Pi is so filled with the memory of his fear he cannot continue his story. Lulu comforts him, while Mrs Okamoto tries to get the facts she needs for her report. Mrs Okamoto convinces Pi to continue his story.

Pi is on the life boat with a broken-legged zebra as the ship sinks beside him. Pi hears splashing and prays it's his sister Rani. Instead, it is Richard Parker, who he forces away. The hyena suddenly appears from its hiding space on the lifeboat and Pi asks for a truce. Orange Juice the orangutan floats from the wreckage on a raft of bananas and joins them on the lifeboat. Time passes with Pi and the animals in an uneasy truce.

The hyena breaks the truce and begins to eat the wounded zebra. Orange Juice is enraged and fights him. At first she seems to be winning, but the hyena kills her in front of Pi. Pi braces himself to fight the hyena, who suddenly backs down. Pi discovers it is because Richard Parker has once more appeared. Richard Parker roars at the hyena.

Act 2

Back in the hospital room in the present. Mrs Okamoto doesn't believe Pi's story about surviving in a life boat for 227 of days with wild animals. She and Lulu ask if he's had counseling, and pick at details of his story. Pi becomes anxious about potentially not having food and water, as the world of the hospital dissolves into his memories.

It's the fifth day at sea. Pi rushes to keep the rations away from Richard Parker. Pi struggles to open the water from the ration box until his memories of Mrs Kumar guide through the logical steps and he can finally drink. She also talks him out of devouring the biscuits, instead forcing himself to ration out the food he has. Richard Parker stares at him, waiting.

Time passes and Pi eats his way through the rations.

It is day 30. Pi is almost out of rations. He reads the survival guide from the ration box and imagines the author is there in the ocean with him. The vision talks him through the steps of survival.

It begins to rain, and shoals of flying fish begin erupting from the water. Pi is entranced. Richard Parker eats a fish, and Pi tries yet again to keep him away.

The ghost of Pi's father comes to him and teaches him how to tame Richard Parker using circus tactics, and the knowledge that Pi can rock the boat to keep Richard Parker seasick and weakened. Richard Parker retreats.

Back at the hospital, Pi is trapped in a memory, swinging an oar to keep everyone away from him, desperate to remain in control. Lulu and Mrs. Okamoto call for the nurse. Pi calls out to his mother. The nurse enters and tries to soothe him. When Pi won't settle, the nurse plans to sedate him. Mrs Okamoto objects. She needs Pi lucid to finish his testimony. She is overridden and Pi is administered the medication. He settles, seeing the endless stars and beauty of the ocean at night. Pi begins describing the lifeboat to them – everything orange, a holy colour in Hinduism, but also the colour of survival. The memories once more sweep Pi back in time.

It's night on the life boat. Pi is fishing. Success is bittersweet to him as he was a vegetarian, and he still struggles with the need to kill animals for food. Pi gives Richard Parker the fish, and chokes down seaweed. Even in his struggle the beauty of the ocean makes him feel a closeness to God, the divine. A tanker horn erupts through the peace, and just as Pi begins to rejoice, the wake of the ship destroys the life sustaining systems he had constructed. The ship continues on, not seeing Pi. Pi questions what past sin he is being punished for.

Five days pass with no water. Richard Parker defecates in the boat. Pi in his desperation attempts to consume it. At his lowest point, he sees a sea turtle. The hallucination of the survival guide author appears to him once more and guides the reluctant Pi through the capture, slaughter and consumption of the creature. As he feasts on the turtle, the ghosts of his family appear to him and walk him through his crisis of faith. Five more days pass, and the world goes black for Pi. In the darkness Richard Parker speaks to Pi. Pi is finally able to release much of his anger towards Richard Parker. He goes to embrace him, but instead is attacked by a stranger. Richard Parker defends him and eats the stranger. The lifeboat suddenly stills, and Pi realizes he is on land at last.

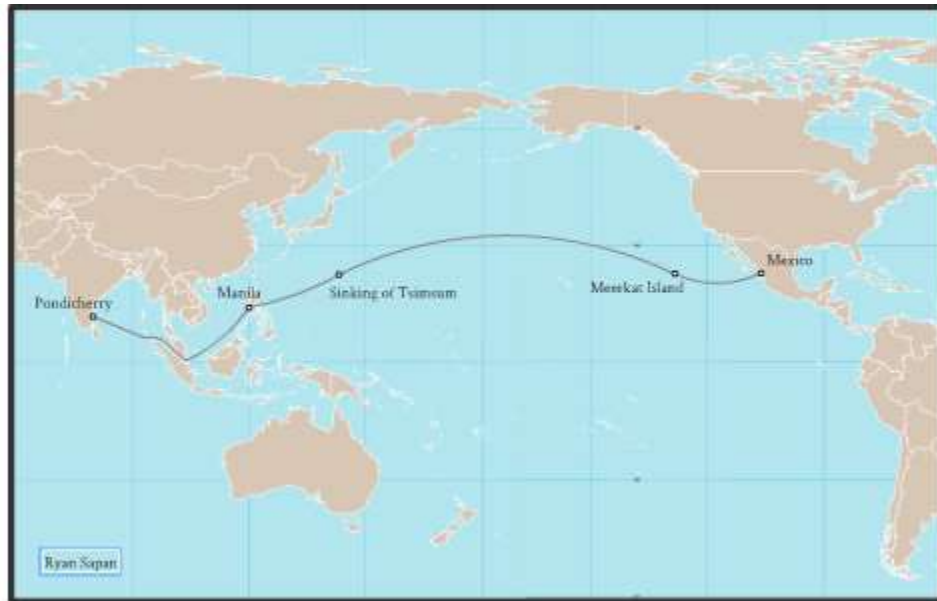
Pi is half in the past, half in the present. He narrates to the ladies about the island he has found himself on. Richard Parker has run off, and meerkats swarm around him. He discovers a fruit tree and eats, only to discover a human tooth in the fruit. He finds tooth after tooth in the fruit he plucks. Lulu and Mrs Okamoto try to stop his story. Pi can't stop. He tells them how he realized the island was carnivorous and he went to flee, only to realize Richard Parker was trapped. Pi saves the tiger, and they set back off. Mrs Okamoto scoffs at his story. Pi snaps back, tired at her inability to believe things she has not seen. Mrs Okamoto tries to force Pi to see that the story he is telling is impossible. Lulu tries to end the session as it is too much for Pi.

Pi offers them another story. When the ship was sinking, he was thrown into a lifeboat and on that boat was the cook, an injured sailor and Amma. The cook resorted to cannibalism, eating the sailor, and Pi was convinced to join him. The cook hit Pi, and Amma fought him and was killed. Then Pi killed and ate the cook. Lulu and Mrs Okamoto realize the parallels between the two stories. They go to leave, and Pi asks if they want to know the end, what happened to Richard Parker.

The lifeboat has reached a beach in Mexico. Pi is filled with joy. Richard Parker hears the voices of their rescuers and slips away, leaving Pi alone once more.

Pi's story finished, the ladies prepare to leave. Pi asks them, now that they have heard both stories, which do they want to be true? In both stories, the ship sinks, Pi's family perishes, and he suffers. They both agree the one with animals is the better one. Pi agrees, saying "and so it goes with God!" – religious stories may have unexplainable elements, but that makes them better stories. Mrs Okamoto

and Lulu leave and Mrs. Okamoto's report is read, stating no further light has been shed on the sinking of the ship, and that Pi's story of survival is astounding; that few have ever survived such an ordeal, and no one else had ever survived in the company of an adult tiger.



Map showing a possible journey of Pi from Pondicherry to Tomatlán.

Context and Related Resources

Pi Patel's Origins

Pi and his family come from Pondicherry. Officially called Puducherry, it is unique in that while most of India was colonized by the British, this region was ruled by France. In 1954, the French possessions were transferred to the Indian Union, and in 1963 Pondicherry officially became part of India. It is known now as "Little France" and "The French Riviera of the East" – hence Pi's name coming from Piscine, French for pool. It has unique Franco-Tamil architecture. The official government site says that culture is rich and diverse, with a unique fusion of several traditions. Education and learning is prized, as this is one of the main educational centres of India. Again, it makes sense that Pi would have been exposed to several ways of thought and religion in Pondicherry, and that he and Rani are able to explore many topics to a high degree in their schooling.

Life of Pi is set during a period of time known as the Emergency, which led to Pi's family deciding to leave India. In the early to mid 1970s in India, there were strikes and protests against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the centralization of power, rising prices, unemployment, and alleged corruption under her leadership. In 1975, a high court ruled against Gandhi in an electoral fraud case. Protests and calls for her to resign were loud and frequent.

On June 25, 1975, president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed took Gandhi's advice and declared a state of emergency against "internal disturbance" which suspended constitutional rights and let Gandhi rule by decree. The 21 months of the Emergency are described as "the only dictatorial turn in India's democratic history." Electricity was cut off to certain neighbourhoods, no newspapers could be printed

and the press was severely censored, detention laws were passed to imprison and abuse opponents, the courts had their role restricted so nobody could challenge the election, there was a crackdown on workers' rights, people were displaced as buildings and impoverished areas were demolished in the name of "cleaning up," and population control took the form of paying or even forcing people to be sterilized.

The Emergency ended suddenly in 1977 when Gandhi called for a new general election and released several of the political figures who were imprisoned. She was defeated and many laws were re-written. There is a mixed legacy of the Emergency as some saw it as bringing in a period of stability and order, and some remember it as just a brief interlude; political scientist Myron Weiner said in 1980 that Indian Politics had "returned to normal." However, journalist Soutik Biswas says that it should be a reminder that democracy is fragile if institutions don't hold power to account, and that it is also a warning against the perils of hero worship.

While not discussed in detail in *Life of Pi*, we find at the beginning of the play that Pi's father is nervous about the political situation and depressing economic conditions, leading to his decision to move his zoo and family to Canada for new opportunities.

Related Resource Links: Watch a [short video \(4:33\) about The Emergency](#) for some more context, or take a deeper dive with [this half-hour documentary about the period](#).

Magical Realism

Magic or magical realism is a genre where fantastical elements are brought to realistic situations. The genre evolved from folklore and storytelling in South and Central America, where many of the elements that today's stories use were relied on. As English translations of Latin-American books entered the market, magical realism spread far and wide. Penguin Books says that "the giddy combination of fantasy and reality also allowed political expression to flourish in a way that was not always possible in more traditional forms" leading to its popularity from the 1960s to today.

Author Sadé Omeji says that works in this genre often include a non-linear, fluid or cyclical sense of time. If a plot requires magical creatures and settings to keep the story going, it is not considered magical realism, but something like *Life of Pi* is: animals have human personalities and Pi encounters an island that is not all it seems (no further spoilers!) but the story also deals with realistic problems, from big feelings like grief and trauma to basic concerns like sunburn and hunger. Magical realism is delivered in a matter-of-fact tone, grounded in settings that we can identify with.

Theatre can approach this genre in a different way than books, as a medium that always invites you to suspend your disbelief, but can also show you visuals and elements that in reading a book, you'd have to imagine. In this production of *Life of Pi* you will see and hear the magical and the realistic side by side, and it's up to you to interpret all you experience!

Puppetry

In a production where the animals are as important - and maybe even get more stage time than - the people, it's important to make them feel like real characters for the audience and the performers alike. Liz Nicholls of Edmonton's Twelfth Night calls *Life of Pi* "the Olympics of puppetry." The puppets in this production of the script are built by Calgary company Puppet Stuff. All the designs are original. They began with the Puppet Stuff artists sculpting small clay forms of the animals, integrating the ideas of shipwrecks, waves, and water formations. These were then copied as cardboard miniatures for practice. They evolved into life-sized creatures - the tiger Richard Parker is actually slightly bigger than most real tigers - that got their shapes from 3D scans of the clay sculptures. This method captured the original artistic gestures of the Puppet Stuff artists, making the puppets feel like they have movement and life even before they're operated.



Photo of Leah Carmichael painting the face of the hyena puppet.

The puppets are 3D printed from very thin plastic, like shells. They must be very lightweight to be operated by only one or two performers; the cast includes two actors very skilled in physical theatre whose only job is to puppeteer. The 12 other actors puppeteer when possible between other roles.

The puppeteers' job is to animate an inanimate object. Members of the *Life of Pi* touring company said that three of the main principles of puppetry are breath, focus, and weight. When we can see and hear a puppet breathing, it allows us to believe that the creature is alive and taking in oxygen as their lungs inflate. The speed of breath also communicates emotion, like tension or fear vs relaxation and comfort. Focus needs to be precise to show us what the puppet is looking at, based on where its eyeline is. A clear focus shows the puppet has intention and thoughts, and use of the eyeline lets the audience believe in the puppet's desires and intentions. Finally, the body of the puppet is as important as its mind and spirit, so conveying weight by showing the effects of muscles and gravity is important. For example, when the puppet jumps, it will help the audience believe if it prepares (bends or squats) before releasing into the air, and then recovers (muscles bend as it lands).

While the goal of puppetry in *Life of Pi* is to enhance and help tell the story rather than distract and take you out of the moment, you can see what you notice about this art form as you experience the show!

Related Resource Links: Read an [article about Puppet Stuff from 12thNight](#) for more about the company and *Life of Pi*-specific details. Exploring the [World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts](#) will teach you more about this art form; of special interest might be [Myth of the Puppet – A Western Perspective](#) or [Storytelling](#).

Intensity and Emotion in Theatre

Adapted from ART.

While there are some acts of violence in *Life of Pi* (the visual expression of animals' predator–prey relationship), they are brief, and necessary for the story. These moments may evoke temporary distress due to the abruptness of the actions, the relationship we have with the characters, and the ways we make sense of the events based on our own experiences. It can be helpful to prepare for such moments by thinking about the larger purpose of including acts of intensity or violence in a piece of theater. The handful of moments of violence are part of a larger theme of experiencing ferocity—the ferocity of the sea against Pi's raft, the ferocity of natural selection, the ferocity of profound loss—and practicing coping through imagination and storytelling.

Studies have shown for years that experiencing emotional events together strengthens bonds between people. Theatre, as an art form that is usually meant for people to see in groups, leans into this. In 2017, Gabriel et al measured how “experiences of collective assembly” affect us and said “[c]ollective assembly is more than just people coming together to distract themselves from life by watching a game, concert, or play—instead it is an opportunity to feel connected to something bigger than oneself; it is an opportunity to feel joy, social connection, meaning, and peace.”

Recently, another study showed that seeing emotional content generated strong physiological responses, and that when people could see each other during these experiences, they reported more intense emotions and feeling more connected, which the researchers say suggests that watching emotional scenes together is associated with social bonding “even when this person is a stranger, and without any verbal communication.” Brené Brown, a well-known researcher and storyteller who focuses on courage, vulnerability, and empathy, advocates for human connection as a way to counter “hat[ing] from afar, dehumanizing others” and bridging gaps between ideologies. She says “I can stand up for what I believe is right when I know that regardless of the pushback and criticism, I’m connected to myself and others in a way that is unseverable” but that maintaining belief in that connection involves seeking out moments of collective emotion to remind us of our common humanity. This foundation of connection can support us if we are in conflict. Gathering together meets the “primal human need” for shared social experience, and by experiencing intense emotions together, we can build even deeper connections.

When asked what she wants the audience to think and feel when watching this play, Lolita Chakrabarti responded, “I want us all to travel with Pi’s emotional journey—to feel his love, joy, and wonder and then to really feel his devastating loss. Everyone has felt loss in some form no matter what age you are. By the age of seven, we have experienced the full range of human emotions, and as we age, that response simply becomes more complex. I hope people travel with us emotionally and at the end have a positive, full, meaningful experience. This is a universal story, so I really think there’s something in it for everyone.”

Theatre artists consider several factors around how their work impacts the audience, such as what to show, what to talk about, and what to act out. You, as a member of the audience, help to create the meaning behind the choices the artists make, by interpreting those choices. You might wish to consider ways to show yourself care during or after the show if you experience a strong emotion, and be assured that you are not alone.

Related Resource Links: Read some of the articles mentioned in this writeup: [The Guardian summarizes the study about intense emotions](#); Greater Good Magazine hosts [Brené Brown's writing on the topic](#), and you can [read the whole collective assembly study as a pdf](#).

The American Repertory Theatre partnered with Dr. Charmain Jackman and InnoPsych to discuss storytelling and coping, PTSD, grief, and list some web resources – [explore the Healing Guide here](#).



Braydon Dowler-Coltman, Troy Feldman and Davinder Malhi with the puppet of Richard Parker. Photos by Nanc Price.

Glossary

Compiled by Hailley Rhoda.

Amma – Mother.

As-Salaam-Alaikum – an Arabic greeting meaning “peace be upon you”

Agnostic – one who believes the existence of the divine is unknowable.

Atheist – one who does not believe deities exist.

Auspicious – favourable, positive; giving or being a sign of future success.

Baba – here used to mean Father, but can also be used as a respectful prefix to names or to mean grandfather or wise man.

Bar Mitzvah – Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for boys.

Botanical garden – a garden for the culture, study, and exhibition of special plants.

Brahmin – one who has gained supreme self-knowledge.

Cohabitation – existing in the same time or place.

Consular officer – someone who provides emergency and non emergency services to citizens, specifically around visa’s and interactions with foreign nationals.

Crocuta Crocuta – scientific name for spotted hyena.

Distilled water – water that has been purified.

Durga – Hindu goddess who symbolises the divine forces.

Gentility – social superiority demonstrated by genteel manners, behaviour, or appearances.

Gold Flake – classic Indian cigarette brand.

Hajj – traditional pilgrimage to Mecca made by Muslims.

Hoi ram – a call to help from a higher power (similar to “oh my God!”)

Kali – a major Hindu goddess associated with time, death, destruction, and transcendental knowledge.

Lord Vishnu – a principal deity of Hinduism, the god of preservation.

Lychee – fruit with pinkish-red rough shell and sweet fleshy interior.

Mamaji – maternal uncle (brother of your mother).

Oarlock – the braces that attach oars to the boat

Reincarnated – the belief that a soul or spirit begins life in a new body after death.

Sanctity – state or quality of being holy, sacred, or saintly.

Solitude – the state of being alone.

Sphincter – a ring of muscle surrounding and guarding an opening or tube.

Swami – a male Hindu religious leader.

Tarpulin – a large sheet of water-resistant fabric.

Yarn-spinning – telling stories, particularly imaginative ones.

Foods mentioned in *Life of Pi*

Almond Payasam – Indian pudding variety made with almonds, sugar, saffron, cardamoms and whole milk.

Black Gram Dahl – popular lentil side dish.

Boeuf bourguignon – a French beef stew that involves braising with red wine.

Chicken a la Bretonne – traditional dish of the Brittany region of France.

Coconut chutney – traditional south Indian condiment with fresh coconut meat blended with chilies, cumin, ginger and salt.

Confit of duck – slow cooked duck that is crisped to finish.

Green chili pickle – a popular Indian condiment, with spicy peppers pickled in oil, vinegar and lots of seasonings.

Jaggery pancake – made with jaggery (a natural unrefined sugar) instead of white sugar. They have a richer, caramely sweetness to them.

Lychee – fruit with pinkish-red rough shell and sweet fleshy interior.

Mango lassi – yogurt-based beverage with smoothie-like consistency.

Masala dosa – savoury pancake stuffed with potato curry.

Mint chutney – spicy, flavoursome Indian side dip made with fresh mint leaves and spices like chilies, garlic & cumin

Mixed vegetable sagu – side dish of vegetables simmered with spices and thickened with gram flour

Naan – a fluffy flatbread.

Parathas – flatbread with crispy exterior and soft buttery interior.

Potato masala – side dish of boiled potatoes with whole spices, onions and herbs.

Saucisse de Strasbourg – smoked sausage seasoned with garlic and spices, from the Alsatian region.

Spicy lentil rasam – traditional lentil soup made with tomatoes, warming spices, and aromatic herbs.

Spicy tamarind sambar – lentil-based stew with tangy flavour from tamarind pulp.

Sweet – a candy.

Sweetbread – thymus gland or pancreas.

Tripe – the edible lining of an animal's stomach.

Vegetable korma – creamy dish where vegetables are braised with yogurt, nuts, onion paste, or coconut.

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More Fantastical Voyages

The Cat's Table, Michael Ondaatje. Travel on an ocean liner with a solo eleven-year-old in the 1950s from Sri Lanka to England. Michael is placed at the lowly "Cat's Table" during mealtimes where he witnesses eccentric grownups spinning webs of fantastical worlds. Partially told looking back from adulthood the narrator unfolds layered tales of the magical yet often difficult discoveries of childhood that spark a lifelong journey. FICTION ONDAATJE

The Alchemist, Paulo Coelho. Follow a young Andalusian shepherd who travels to Egypt after a fortune teller reveals he will discover treasure at the pyramids. Instead, he meets a wise alchemist. From young idealism to mature wisdom the alchemist teaches the shepherd to realize his true self and journey towards realizing that home is really where the treasure is.

FICTION COELHO

The Goldfinch, Donna Tartt. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize a young boy miraculously survives an accident in New York when it claims his mother's life. Abandoned by his father and trying to make sense of his new life, he is drawn into the art underworld by a painting of his mother's. This modern-day odyssey is one of self-invention and the monumental power of art.

FICTION TARTT

Explore More Animals and Humans

H is for Hawk, Helen Macdonald. This is the story of how one woman trained a goshawk. From childhood Helen MacDonald was determined to become a falconer. When drowning in the grief of her father's death she becomes obsessed with training her own. This book is a record of a spiritual journey, struggle with grief, and how it might be possible to reconcile death with life and love. 598.944 MACD 2015

Heal the beasts: a jaunt through the curious history of the veterinary arts, Phillipp Schott.

This biography tells the heart wrenching story of a girl from Saskatchewan became a superstar of folk music. Her influence on generations of singer-songwriters is undeniable and the author shows us why in this definitive book. 636.089 SCHOTT 2025

A woman among wolves: My journey through forty years of wolf recovery, Diane Boyd. In the 1970s Diane Boyd was the only female biologist in the US researching and radio-collaring wolves. Dubbed the Jane Goodall of wolves after 40 years of studying and advocating for these wild dogs, she has faced grizzlies, mountain lions, and wolverines. Her stories highlight her resourcefulness, the beauty of this apex predator, and her admiration for them.

570.92 BOYD 2024

Explore More with adaptations!

Life of Pi [DVD recording] Explore the multiple award-winning film adaptation of Life of Pi directed by Ang Lee. DVD FILM/TV LIF



There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and there's an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your card.

Visit us at Winnipeg.ca/library

Discussion and Writing Prompts

From ART, with augmentation.

Pre-Show:

- What are the differences between a novel, film, and theater performance? What are the unique strengths of each form?
 - What is the impact of each form on the audience?
- What are you able to do with a novel that you can't do in theatre, and vice-versa?
- What can a puppet do that a human cannot? Why would you choose to use a puppet instead of an actor?
- What's the difference between an invisible puppeteer and a visible one? How does that affect the storytelling? What's the potential of each approach?
- Think about your own relationship to belief and/or religion. How does it show up in your everyday life? How does it show up in society?
- What affects people's ability to communicate about belief and/or religion? What are the entry points and obstacles?
- Looking for the "meaning of life" suggests one answer, but asking "how should I live?" suggests a journey of actions and discovery. What would your answer be to "how should I live?" Consider revisiting this question after seeing the performance to see if your perspective has changed.
- What are the differences between lying, storytelling, daydreaming, and documenting? How are they similar? How do they affect people?
- How do you turn a painful event into a story instead of just reciting the sequence of events? How does it change your relationship with the listener?

Post-Show:

- (Recalling earlier discussion) How were certain moments portrayed differently in this production than the novel? Why do you think these changes were made? Were they effective to you?
- What did you think of the use of puppets and how the actors manipulated them? What was effective about their portrayal?
- What's the difference between an invisible puppeteer and a visible one? How does that affect the storytelling? What's the potential of each approach?
- What are the different ways in which puppets are introduced in the performance? What's the impact of these different approaches?
- What does the character of Richard Parker represent for Pi? How is the fact that he's a puppet emphasize/detract from those representations?
- Think about different moments in the production. How does the meaning of Richard Parker change over time for Pi and for the audience?
- What do you think is next for Pi after the events of the play? Did his experience of a traumatic event and his struggle to make meaning prepare him for how to live?
- Looking for the "meaning of life" suggests one answer but asking "how should I live?" suggests a journey of actions and discovery. What would your answer be to "how should I live?"
- How do you turn a painful event into a story instead of just reciting the sequence of events? How does it change your relationship with the listener?
- What purposes did the intense moments in *Life of Pi* serve? What was your experience? How did you notice the people around you reacting?

- For those who read the book: what in this production lined up with your imagination from when you were reading? Did you prefer to experience this story as a novel or a play, and why?
 - After seeing *Life of Pi*, what other works are you curious about being adapted into plays?

Suggested Classroom Activities

Exploring Adaptation: Before starting, you can you can [read this note from author Yann Martel](#) about how he sees the differences in writing for literature, film, and theatre; [a Q&A with Yann where he ends with speaking about adaptation](#), and this [interview with adapter Lolita Chakrabarti](#) about that process.

- Have students think of a novel or other form of media that they have enjoyed. Write a persuasive letter or speech to a theatre producer and artistic director proposing an adaptation of the chosen piece.
 - Include why you think this piece of media is successful, and which elements you think would translate well to theatre performance; why it is relevant to today's theatre audiences; suggestions for two or three key scenes that could be adapted (you could include a short script for one of those scenes, too)
 - Anticipate any challenges that the story holds (for example, is there a strong fantasy element that would be difficult to stage in front of a live audience?) and how you might deal with those challenges.
- Theatrefolk has a free [lesson outline and downloadable worksheet about adapting](#) source material for the theatre.

The following activities are adapted from American Repertory Theatre.

Making a Meaning Map: [This exercise](#) guides students through the process of creating this tool to visually represent relationships between concepts. To connect to *Life of Pi*, a possible question to explore is “what is the meaning of life?” Meaning Maps could be done before the show, after the show, or two could be made, one on either side of the experience.

Identity and Storytelling: [This resource from Facing History and Ourselves](#) includes lesson plans and multi-genre texts for a 1-2 week unit exploring the question “what makes me, me?” Requires a free account.

Pre-Show Puppetry: ART has put together a [lesson plan for a school workshop about puppetry](#). The learning goals are:

- Students will consider the essential question of *Life of Pi*: How can telling stories help us cope and survive?
- Using the art of puppetry as a foundation for exploration, students will create a simple puppet and explore non-verbal and physical means of creating a character and environment.
- Students will work collaboratively by exploring the principles of focus, breath, and weight/movement in the creation of short puppet pieces.
-

Physicalizing Character – Creating the Animals: As *Life of Pi* began development, the team knew that there had to be animal characters, but not that they would ultimately be portrayed by puppets. There were experiments with humans playing the animals too, which this exercise explores. It also helps focus students on doing rather than thinking.

Choose one of the animals from *Life of Pi* (e.g., the tiger, goat, giraffe, zebra, hyena, or orangutan) and watch videos, listen to sounds, and study photos to understand how it moves and communicates.

- Have students walk around the room and begin shaping them into their animals with the following prompts:
 - How is your animal shaped? Think about the curve in its back. How does that effect the way it moves?
 - Does your animal have fins, hooves, paws, or hands?
 - Does your animal have a tail?
 - Does your animal have fur, feathers, scales? Is its skin smooth, bumpy, hot or cold? Think about how its skin feels.
 - What is the shape of your animals ears? How about its nose? Does it have a snout? What about its mouth? Where are its eyes located? Do they face front or are they farther on the sides of its face?
- Have the students perform basic tasks as their animal – here is a sample dialogue:
 - • “Look over there! Spot it. It’s food. Show me how your animal gets food. What is the food? Did it hunt it, find it, gather it, or was the food given to the animal? Think about how it tastes. Does your animal dip its head down to eat the food, or does it use its hands or paws? Does the shape of its nose or mouth make it easier or harder to eat?”
 - “Now continue moving as your animal. Think about the environment your animal lives in. Is it indoors or outdoors? Is it cold, hot, dry, or humid? Is there sand, water, grass, dirt, trees or bushes? What does the environment smell like?”
 - “Look over there! Spot it. It’s water. Show me how your animal gets water. Is it from a stream, puddle, bowl? Think about how your animal has to drink it.”
 - “Continue moving as your animal in its environment. Think about how your animal plays. Does it swim, jump, fly, skip, hop, leap, run, roll? Your animal must do something for fun, how does it keep itself entertained and going? Find your animal’s playful side and enjoy!”
 - “Then suddenly your animal senses danger. Show me how your animal runs and hides from danger. Find a hiding spot. Stay still and quiet– Keep a look out though!” (Wait for them to be very still and quiet) “Take a look– The coast is clear, your animal is safe, so come on out, and keep exploring your environment as you were.”
 - “Now, your animal has had a long day of eating, drinking, playing, and hiding from danger, so now it’s time for your animal to go to sleep. So show me how your animal takes a nap at the end of the day.”
- In a second round, you may wish to incorporate sound or interaction between animals.
- When students are comfortable with the concept, they can work in pairs with one as actor and one as director to give feedback to create a physical sequence with the animal.
- In puppetry, sometimes different people perform the puppet’s movements and voice. What happens when a partner vocalizes for the animal – what are the opportunities and challenges in this approach?

The above activity was adapted from one submitted by Anna Smith to BroadwayEducators.com

In the same vein, Theatrefolk suggests the following tips for animal-related acting:

- Experiment with levels outside your day-to-day movement
- Find a different body shape, and incorporate shape into movement (does the animal “roll” or keep a triangle shape as it moves, for example?)
- Change your natural movement rhythm by speeding up, slowing down, creating imbalance, having feet close or far apart, etc.

Argumentative Writing: There are many ideas about links between animals and humans in this play; some are spelled out in the script, and others shown as themes. Think about the idea of captivity and being trapped, dominance, survival, or others that you come up with. The point is made that “[humans] are the most dangerous animal in the zoo.” Using examples from the play and other sources, argue whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

The following activities were created by Timothy Reid for the Broadway Education Alliance.

Puppetry is the art 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. Keep in mind the principles of breath, focus, and weight as you try to:

- 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?

Curriculum Connections

Attending Royal MTC's production of *Life of Pi* and discussing it or participating in some of the suggested or similar activities, will fit into Manitoba curricula in the following subjects:

Manitoba English Curriculum

(https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/framework/full_doc.pdf)

As the English Curriculum in Manitoba is in flux, we have not designated SLO numbers to these outcomes, but they all show up in both the 2000 curriculum and the most recent drafts of the new curriculum.

- research and study topics and ideas
- interpret and integrate information and ideas from multiple texts and sources
- manage information and ideas
- become aware of the ways that one engages with text
- recognize, apply and adapt rules and conventions

Drama

DR-R1	The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences.
DR-R2	The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences.
DR-R3	The learner analyzes and interprets drama/ theatre experiences.
DR-R4	The learner applies new understandings about drama/theatre to construct identity and act in transformative ways.
DR-C1	The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts.
DR-C2	The learner experiences and develops an awareness of a variety of dramatic forms, styles, and traditions.
DR-C3	The learner develops understandings about the roles, purposes, and meanings of the dramatic arts.
DR-CR2	The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating drama/theatre.
DR-CR3	The learner revises, refines, and shares drama/theatre ideas and creative work.
DR-M1	The learner develops competencies for using the tools and techniques of body, mind, and voice in a variety of contexts.
DR-M2	The learner develops competencies for using elements of drama/theatre in a variety of contexts.
DR-M3	The learner develops competencies for using a range of dramatic forms and styles.

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