

Year 7 – *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel

Plot	Literary Techniques	QR Codes
Author’s Note: A mix of fact and fiction, the author’s note explains how Yann Martel came to write <i>Life of Pi</i>. The unreliable narrator in the note immediately has us questioning the line between truth and the imagination – a theme that develops as the story unfolds. Part One (Chapters 1 – 36): Mostly narrated by the character Pi, this first part of the novel describes Pi’s upbringing in the Indian town of Pondicherry during the 1960s and 70s where his parents own a zoo. He explains the background to his unusual name, his passion for different religions, and his sadness when his parents decide to emigrate to Canada. Part Two (Chapters 37-94): This long, central section of the book describes how Pi survives the shipwreck as he and his family sail across the ocean to Canada. He finds himself fighting for survival on a lifeboat, alongside a strange mix of zoo animals, in particular his beloved orangutan, Orange Juice, and the fierce tiger named Richard Parker. Part Three (Chapters 95-end): The shorter, final section details how Pi is rescued off the coast of Mexico and the gradual recovery he makes in hospital where he is interviewed by a pair of Japanese detectives about what happened to the ship that sunk and how he managed to survive so long on the ocean.	Alliteration – where two or more words start with the same sound. Example: <i>Piscine Patel</i>. Dialogue – the technical term for speech between two or more characters. Listing – where the writer uses a list of items to emphasise a point they are making. Example: <i>‘ballpoint pens, paper clips, safety pins, rubber bands, combs, coffee spoons...’</i> Metaphor – where an object is said to be something that isn’t literally true but captures its essence. Example: <i>‘Religion is darkness’</i>. Onomatopoeia – where the sound of a word is very similar to its meaning. Example: <i>‘bubbling and belching’</i> Pathetic fallacy – where the environment is given human emotions to reflect a character’s mood. Example: <i>‘Nature can put on a thrilling show.’</i> Personification – where something that isn’t human is given human attributes. Example: <i>‘It was black, cold and in a rage.’</i> (Pi describing the sea.) Present participle verbs – verbs ending in ‘ing’. Examples: <i>rising, sinking, screaming</i>. Simile – where one thing is compared to another using ‘like’ or ‘as’. Example: <i>‘It was as unbelievable as the moon catching fire.’</i> Symbolism – the use of objects to represent ideas Example: The sun as a symbol of the orangutan called Orange Juice. Zeugma – a figure of speech in which a word applies to two others in different senses. Example: <i>‘Everything was screaming: the sea the wind, my heart.’</i>	Punctuation Guide  Further Reading: Review of <i>Life of Pi</i> in The Guardian. 
Characters	Themes	
Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi) is 16 years old when his family decide to emigrate from India to Canada. Obsessed by both zoology (the study of animals) and religion, the young Pi practises Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the world. He needs all his powers of faith to survive for weeks on the lifeboat with only the terrifying Richard Parker for company. Yann Martel is both the writer of the book and a character within it. At regular points during Pi’s narration of his shipwreck adventure, Martel imagines himself going to visit the adult Pi at his home to interview him for the book. These chapters use italics to make it clear to the reader that it is the character Martel narrating. Richard Parker is the name of the tiger with whom Pi finds himself stranded on the lifeboat. Over time, Pi manages to ‘tame’ Richard Parker to an extent using a whistle and Pi comes to regard the tiger as his closest friend. However, he remains aware that the tiger is a wild animal, not a pet. Uncle Mamaji is an eccentric family friend who teaches Pi to swim and becomes a major influence in the young boy’s upbringing. Mr and Mrs Patel are Pi’s parents. His mother is a practising Hindu but his father is more interested in politics. Mr Patel is dismayed at the way the Indian government is ruling the country and decides to sell the zoo and move the family to Canada. Ravi is Pi’s older brother who enjoys teasing his more serious younger sibling, although it is clear that they enjoy a close relationship. Mr Kumar & Mr Kumar are friends of Pi; one is a baker and the other is a teacher.	Faith and Religious Belief - Storytelling and religious belief are two closely linked ideas in the novel. On a literal level, each of Pi’s three religions, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, come with its own set of tales and fables, which are used to spread the teachings and illustrate the beliefs of the faith. Pi enjoys the wealth of stories, but he also senses that, as Father Martin assured him was true of Christianity, each of these stories might simply be aspects of a greater, universal story about love. Friendship – Pi forms friendships with a wide range of people of different ages and backgrounds, including Yann Martel, demonstrating the importance of human connection to leading a happy and fulfilling life. Human-Animal Relationships – Through his descriptions of the animals in the zoo and his evolving relationship with Richard Parker, Pi explores the ways that humans view animals and vice versa. The Importance of Storytelling <i>Life of Pi</i> is a story within a story within a story. At the end of the novel, a transcript taken from an interrogation of Pi reveals the possible “true” story within <i>that</i> story: that there were no animals at all, and that Pi had spent those 227 days with other human survivors who all eventually perished, leaving only himself. Survival and the Will to Live - <i>Life of Pi</i> is a story about struggling to survive through seemingly insurmountable odds. The shipwrecked inhabitants of the little lifeboat don’t simply acquiesce to their fate: they actively fight against it.	Thinking & Writing About Texts Using What – How – Why 