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SAMPLE

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Life of Pi”

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AUTHOR NOTES

The inspiration for *Life of Pi* came from a novel entitled *Max and the Cats* by Moacyr Scliar, a Brazilian author. The outline of the novel is based on a Jewish family who owns a zoo in Berlin in 1933. Amongst the political turmoil they decide to immigrate to Brazil and are shipwrecked in transit. The sole survivor, a Jewish boy, finds himself stranded in a lifeboat with a black panther. Scliar's novel never reached critical acclaim, even though, like Martel's, his story was an allegory; the Jewish boy representing Jewish persecution, whilst the panther being a metaphor for the Nazi party.

Martel was attracted to the premise of the story, but it wasn't until years later in India, trying to ignite a spark of inspiration, that the idea came back to him. Part of the inspiration for the story was the mix of religions India has to offer, as well as the number of animals that co-exist in the bustling streets of Bombay. It was in Matheran, a station near Bombay, that Martel had the idea to parallel the mix of religions with a zoo.

The novel was written over two years; six months in India visiting places of worship and researching zoos and the Indian way of life ; and the remaining time in Canada reading novels on shipwrecks, researching Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, and studying animal behavioural psychology.

In the words of Yann Martel the premise of *Life of Pi* is 'that reality is a story and we can choose our story and so why not pick "the better story"?'

Yann Martel was born in Salamanca, Spain in 1963 to Canadian parents. He spent much of his childhood travelling as his parents were part of the Canadian Foreign Service and he continued to travel as an adult. Martel studied philosophy at Trent University in Ontario and began writing at the age of 27.

'I write to understand issues that are important to me, to express my creative energies and to pass the time in a meaningful way.'

Other titles by Yann Martel

The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories Faber and Faber, 1993

Self Faber and Faber, 1996

Life of Pi Canongate, 2002

We Ate The Children Last Canongate, 2004

Prizes and Awards

1993 Journey Prize (Canada) *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*

1996 Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award (Canada) (shortlist) *Self*

2001 Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction (Canada) (shortlist) *Life of Pi*

2001 Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction (Canada) *Life of Pi*

2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia Region, Best Book) (shortlist) *Life of Pi*

2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction *Life of Pi*

2003 Boeke Prize (South Africa) *Life of Pi*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although there is seemingly little historical fact surrounding the text, there are three elements to India's history which helps in the understanding of Pi's life.

Bapu Gandhi

Bapu means father and this is in reference to Mohandas Gandhi who was instrumental in the non-violent freeing of India from British colonial rule. Gandhi was the leader of the Indian National Congress Party in late 1928 and is still cited as one of India's most influential political figures. In the spring of 1930 he orchestrated the 'Salt March', marching with 80 volunteers 200 miles to extract salt from the sea in protest against British salt laws. He resisted by non resistance (a recurring motif through out the novel). Gandhi dedicated his life to improving Hindu and Muslim relationships.

Mountbatten Plan, 1947

The Mountbatten Plan was designed to split India into two separate regions based on religion, as a way to curtail the civil unrest and violence. The two regions became what are known today as India and Pakistan; both countries still fighting over the possession of Kashmir. Gandhi was adamantly opposed to such a split. (This explains Pi's family's confusion over his devotion to Islam. Christianity was a factor of British and French rule, and as Santosh Patel says, gave them good schools).

Indira Gandhi

Indira Gandhi is no relation to Bapu Gandhi, rather she was India's first, and to date only female Prime Minister. In 1975 Gandhi was found guilty of election fraud relating to her 1971 election campaign. Rather than resign, she declared a state of emergency that suspended all constitutional rights and allowed her the power to rule via decree. This period of time is now known as The Emergency, lasting for eighteen months and officially ended in March of 1977. Through this period of time Gandhi imprisoned many of her opponents, however the country also experienced a period of economic growth. It is Gandhi's politics that unsettles Santosh Patel, as he is fearful that his zoo will be taken away from him amongst the increasing political unrest. This is the impetus for the Patel family's move to Canada.