

The theme of survival in *Life of Pi*

Survival and the will to survive

This novel shows that the ability to survive despite tremendous odds requires a combination of instinct and strength of will. Pi is determined to survive and he uses all his resources in order to do so. The survival manual aboard the lifeboat also says the will to live is necessary for survival (p. 167).

The table below shows what Pi does to survive.

HOW TO SURVIVE	EVIDENCE
Adapt to the surroundings/situation.	All creatures adapt to survive. A sloth survives through laziness and the colour-changing algae that camouflage it (p. 11). Pi adapts to his situation. At first it is difficult for him to kill in order to eat but then he gets used to it (p. 185). Faced with starvation, Pi even eats something humans do not normally eat. He admits to eating pieces of dried flesh of the blind Frenchman (p. 250).
Remember valuable lessons learnt.	Pi's father teaches them the lesson that a wild animal is dangerous. He does this to ensure their survival (p. 39).
Hold onto hope.	Clinging onto hope is a way to survive. After he survives the first night, Pi has hope that he will be rescued (p. 120).
Do not give up the will to live.	Pi's will to survive is key. He says that some, like him, never stop fighting for survival (p. 148).
Accept you have nothing to lose.	When Pi first realises Richard Parker is on the boat, he finds the courage to look for supplies knowing that he is no match for the tiger (p. 135).
Find something to distract you.	Watching the barnacles helps to calm Pi and ease his stress (p. 196).
Be mentally strong.	Pi's mental strength keeps him going. When things are particularly bleak, he is rejuvenated when he sees something, however small, in a new light (p. 140).
Stay active in mind and body so as not give in to despair.	Pi spends time measuring the boat, unpacking the locker, reading the manual, keeping a journal, building a raft, collecting water from solar stills, building a canopy, following a daily ritual of cleaning himself, cleaning his fishing gear, putting things away. Keeping busy takes his mind off his plight (p. 185).
Depend on yourself; do not rely on outside help.	When rescue does not happen, Pi realises it is up to him to do all he can to save himself (p. 168).
Look for the positives.	Pi manages to find a positive whenever there is a disappointment. When flares fail to draw attention, he says they smelled of cumin and reminded him of home (p. 198).
Do not count the days – go one step at a time.	Pi also does not keep track of time and says that is one reason he was able to survive (p. 190).
Keep your sense of humour.	Humour also helps Pi to stay positive (a necessary aspect of surviving). When training Richard Parker to respect his territory and see him as the alpha on the boat Pi says he will make the lifeboat rock and roll like Elvis Presley (p. 202).
Compete to survive.	Competition also leads people to do terrible things in order to survive. From the second story that Pi tells, it is evident that the cook kills the sailor and Pi's mother in order to preserve himself. Later, Pi kills the cook to save himself. There is a reference to this in the first story with the animals when Richard Parker "tells" him that he killed a man and a woman out of need (p. 243).
Hold onto your faith.	Faith is linked to Pi's will to survive. He prays five times a day and maintains as many religious rituals as he can while on the lifeboat. Each time he catches a sea creature he thanks God for it and prays for its soul. He tells himself, "so long as God is with me, I will not die" (p. 148).

How Pi uses Richard Parker to survive

“It was Richard Parker who calmed me down. It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness.”

Write an essay of 400–450 words in which you discuss this statement made by Pi at the end of the novel. Describe how Richard Parker changes from being an agent of death for Pi to being his saviour.

PARAGRAPH 1: Introduction: showing understanding of the question: how essay will answer the question: brief comments on the main points required by the question

When Pi finds himself drifting in a small lifeboat with a tiger, he is full of fear, knowing that the animal will inevitably kill and devour him. This essay will discuss how Richard Parker provides Pi with two things essential to his survival: companionship and the challenge of keeping him alive and training the tiger to keep a safe distance. In this way, the tiger instead of being his killer, ironically helps Pi to find the will to live, as well as bringing him emotional and spiritual peace and wholeness.

PARAGRAPH 2: First point to do with RP's role in giving Pi motivation to live

Although at first Richard Parker represents an agent of death to Pi, Pi comes to realise that he and Richard Parker can survive if Pi can overcome the challenges presented by the tiger. In this way he can also overcome his deep despair at the loss of his family.

PARAGRAPH 3: Discussion of reason why Pi must keep RP alive

At first, he thinks he can survive if he allows the tiger to die of hunger and thirst so the tiger will no longer threaten his safety. When he thinks logically about this plan, he realises that the tiger, driven by extreme hunger and thirst, could leap into the sea and attack him on his raft. He also realises that he does not want to face his ordeal completely alone. Thus he decides he has to keep Richard Parker alive at all costs and find a way of preventing the tiger from attacking him.

PARAGRAPH 4: Details of plan of action, development of skills to survive

This decision pushes him into developing survival skills, such as catching fish and sea turtles. He also ensures a ration of fresh water from rain and from the stills which convert seawater to fresh water. In this way he ensures a regular supply of food both for himself and for Richard Parker.

PARAGRAPH 5: Discussion of plan of action to ensure safety from RP attack

In order to keep Richard Parker at a safe distance, and to establish his dominance over the tiger, Pi successfully uses his knowledge of animal psychology and lion taming. His positive reinforcement is food and water; his negative reinforcement is blowing his whistle and rocking the boat to make the tiger seasick.

PARAGRAPH 6: Discussion of results of the above + irony of shift in role of RP

Thus Pi manages to develop valuable skills, which in turn give him confidence and hope. Ironically, during their ordeal, Richard Parker turns out to be Pi's companion rather than his killer, and comes to represent a family member to Pi in the sense that the tiger is a creature for which Pi has to care and to whom he expresses his most intimate thoughts and feelings.

PARAGRAPH 7: Conclusion: referring back to question

In the end, having survived his ordeal, Pi feels physically and emotionally stronger. The love he develops for the tiger brings him wholeness and peace, since it is love, and the love of God, which he has been seeking in his pursuit of his three religions.