

Microtheme 1: Close Reading

Description:	2–3 pages, double spaced
Source:	Martel, <i>Life of Pi</i>
Total Points:	50
Due Date:	Tues 2/12

The Assignment

Choose one of the following passages from Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi* and write a close reading of it:

- Page 16-17, “Animals in the wild... where it usually stands.”
- Page 62, “One such time... Atman met Allah.”
- Page 177, “I awoke once ... went back to sleep.”
- Page 215-16, “To be a castaway... madness, hopelessness, apathy.”

Strategies

Focus on the different “levels” of the text, answering the following questions in individual paragraphs:

1. **How do the linguistic elements of this paragraph set a particular tone?** That is, what do the paragraph’s grammar and syntax (short, concise sentences? long, complicated ones? passive voice? active voice?) do to contribute to the feeling, or tone, of the paragraph?
2. **How do the descriptive elements of this paragraph contribute to this tone?** That is, what or who is this paragraph’s major concern/focus? How does this paragraph’s description/word choice of the person(s) or event indicate how the author wants his/her readers to feel or think about them? Are there other associations the author seems to be gesturing to through his/her word choice? (Don’t forget about figurative language here!)
3. **How does this paragraph’s location in the story affect its contribution to the story as a whole?** That is, why might the author have chosen to place this paragraph where s/he did? Does this paragraph begin to form our impression of a particular situation or character, or does it conclude that impression? Why is that important for our overall understanding of the story?
4. **What is the relationship between your answers to #1, #2, and #3?**

Think of this microtheme as four short answers—no introduction, no transitions between paragraphs. That said, each topic sentence should make an argument related to the question posed in #1, #2, #3, or #4. Because the goal of this assignment is to focus closely on one specific passage, your paragraphs answering #1 and #2 should not mention the rest of the story. Focus on only the linguistic and descriptive elements of your one specific paragraph.

Explain how quotations from the paragraph demonstrate your argument. Don’t simply write, “This paragraph’s word choice describes Richard Parker as large and frightening.” You must explain what specifically makes that happen, and how: “Pi thinks to himself that Richard Paker’s head ‘looked the size of the planet Jupiter to my dazed senses. His paws were like volumes of *Encyclopedia Britannica*.’ These similies show us how enormous Parker appears to Pi, but more importantly, the connotations of these words also make Parker appear regal and refined because these comparisons allude to Greek mythology—Jupiter was the king of the gods—and to expensive objects of higher education.”

Format

Paper formatting, citations, and works cited list follows MLA style: 12-point Times New Roman font; double-spaced; stapled; header on first page including your name, course, instructor name, date, and assignment title.

Criteria for Evaluation

1. Thoughtful answers to each of the posed questions that move beyond what someone who quickly read the story would say about it.
2. Specific citations of language from chosen paragraph.
3. Clearly explains how quotations support/demonstrate answers to questions #1, #2, and #3.
4. Addresses an audience who is familiar with the story but wants to think critically about it.
5. Attentive to language and clarity: readable style with correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and MLA citation.