

2023 Classical Literature Scholarship--1st Place

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The Better Story

A 4" by 3" card ruined my life. I remember the moment like it was yesterday. The smell of a storm fills my nose. I can feel my body standing on the studs of my white cleats and my hands wiping tears from my eyes. The bitter taste comes back to my mouth. The twelve words, "Unfortunately, we have decided that that was an obvious goal scoring opportunity," ring in my ears. But most vividly, I can see the referee reaching into his front pocket and pulling out a red card.

Walking off the field it felt like my world was crumbling beneath me. What was I supposed to do. I couldn't explain it, but this red card had ruined my life. The next day while talking to my soccer coach about what had happened he said something that felt impossible. He said, "This red card could be the best thing that ever happened to you." When the words first came out of his mouth, and up until about a month ago he was wrong. My red card had been one of the worst experiences of my life, it could never become one of the best.

About a month ago is when we started reading *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel in Socratic. It's a fictitious book about a boy named Pi who is stranded on a lifeboat for 227 days. Word by word Martel was pulling me in. And little did I know what kind of lesson he would teach me by the end. When I read the final line on page 319 and closed the book, I was confused. Which story was true and how could I find it?

After discussing the ending with my fellow classmates and teacher it finally clicked. Martel had been preparing me for the ending all along, I had just failed to see it. At the beginning of the story, when Pi is joining his third religion he says, "There's sunlight and shade, spots and

patterns of colour, your mind is elsewhere— so you don't make out what is right in front of you” (Martel 59). Martel was warning me. If I was going to get so caught up in one aspect of a story I would miss everything else.

Pi tells the story of being stranded in the middle of the sea on a tiny lifeboat with a bengal tiger, an orangutan, a zebra, and a hyena. He explains how it ended up being just him and the tiger, Richard Parker, and he tells his stories of surviving on the lifeboat. Then, when his story falls on disbelieving ears it shifts. The lifeboat no longer contained four animals, but instead four people. Himself, his mom, a sailor, and the cook. The stories were almost identical, the people just took the place of the animals.

After explaining the two different stories Martel, through Pi, changed my life when he said, “The world isn't just the way it is. It is how we understand it, no? And in understanding something, we bring something to it no? Doesn't that make life a story?” (Martel 302). The way I interpreted the story mattered, and there was a good, better, and best way to do so.

My red card wasn't just the way it was. Coach was right, it could become one of the best things that happened to me, if I let it. The facts of the story weren't going to change, but Martel showed me that it didn't matter. It wasn't the event, but the way I choose to understand it that did. There is a good way to understand it, but I have to always be striving to understand the better way. My red card was a life changing event. It may seem trivial to most people, but it truly has changed me. Life is going to throw things at me that I don't expect and that I may even think is unfair, but I always have the choice to understand them in the best way.

I am grateful for books like *Life of Pi*, that share stories that teach me life lessons, so that I don't have to be stranded on a lifeboat but instead get a red card to learn important lessons like I get to choose how I see my story.