

SHOUT OUT FOR SHARKS

EDUCATION PACK

PART 3



SHARK FICTION: FEEDING THE FEAR
WHY DO PEOPLE FEAR SHARKS?



PART 3 SHARK FICTIONS: FEEDING THE FEAR



FirstNews 
EDUCATION



TEACHER NOTES

Key questions

- Why do people fear sharks?
- What was the impact of the film *Jaws*?
- Why does the media misrepresent sharks?
- How do humans portray sharks in culture?

Learning objectives

- To understand that sharks are misunderstood because they have been stereotyped in different forms of human culture.
- To find out facts and information to be able challenge the stereotype of sharks and 'myth-bust'.

This section involves **four shorter discussion and investigation activities**.

ACTIVITY ONE: THE IMPACT OF JAWS

i) What was the film about?

Introductory discussion questions

- Why do pupils think people might be afraid of sharks?
- The film *Jaws* was released almost 50 years ago. Ask pupils how many of them had heard of the film *Jaws* before beginning this project.
- Read the introductory paragraph that summaries *Jaws*. Why do pupils think the film was so popular?
- Why do they think people like to be scared and frightened by stories and films?

Activity

- Look at the original advertising poster for the film. Just like the film, it was designed to terrify people and it misrepresented sharks in order to exaggerate the danger.
- Study the poster and see if pupils can work out ways the poster has been designed to give a misleading image of great white sharks to feed the fear.

Plenary discussion question

- Discuss what pupils have spotted.
- These are the ways the poster purposefully misleads and creates fear:

The proportions

The shark – which is supposed to be a great white – is massive and completely out of proportion to the human; it is as wide as the length of the adult swimmer. No living shark is this big.

A 'man-hunter'

The poster (and the storyline) suggests that sharks set out to prey on humans. In reality, sharks do not hunt humans and most bites are exploratory – big sharks can only investigate objects with their teeth.

Terrifying teeth

The teeth in the picture aren't actually those of a great white shark (which are quite triangular), they are those of a mako shark, which are thinner, more pointy and jaggedly spaced. It creates a scarier image.





ii) What were the immediate repercussions of this successful, scary film?

- Read the section: 'What immediate impact did the film have?'
- Ask pupils to identify the three changes in human behaviour the film instantly had. These were:
 - i) The film was a global success and everywhere people became scared of sharks.
 - ii) People stopped swimming in the sea because they were scared.
 - iii) People in the east coast of the USA where the film was set, took up shark hunting as a hobby. Killing sharks was normalised and seen as important.

iii) What was the long-term impact of the movie?

- Read the section: 'What long-term impact did the film have?'
- Decades later *Jaws* is still causing problems. Can pupils identify and summarise the two main problems?

These are:

- i) People continue to be unnecessarily scared of sharks, as the Bite-Back survey shows.
- ii) This fear and misrepresentation of sharks over the last half a century holds back vital shark conservation efforts.

ACTIVITY TWO: CHARACTER OR CARICATURE

In this next activity, the discussion is widened out to other fictional sharks that pupils have met in stories, films, TV programmes, cartoons and videogames as they've grown up.

- Together collect as many examples of fictional sharks as you can. Think about what role the shark character has. Are they 'goodies' or 'baddies'? Or do they have a different role in stories?
- Discuss what impression these fictional shark characters create. What human characters are they being made to portray?
- Do pupils think these fictional sharks have shaped their own opinions of sharks? For example, how does *The Meg* or *Baby Shark* change pupils' feelings for real sharks?
- Thinking about what they've learnt so far in this project, do the fictional characters represent sharks in reality? In what way are sharks victims rather than villains?

ACTIVITY THREE: HEADLINE HYSTERIA

Over the decades since *Jaws* was released, the **news media** have used people's fear of sharks to create hysterical headlines to increase the drama in **news reports** of rare human encounters with sharks.

This activity looks at how 'clickbait' headlines fuel fear in order to make people read news stories. These headlines are written simply to sell newspapers or to get more viewers or online 'clicks' so a news provider can make more money from advertising.

- Discuss **vocabulary choices** made by journalists to make headlines more frightening in the examples given.
- Identify this use of **negative vocabulary** in the next set of headlines.
- Then have some fun with how using **negative** or **positive words** within a headline completely changes its meaning. Discuss how changing words changes people's thinking and viewpoints.
- What stereotypes have the media continued to create about sharks? Why were they happy to do this?
- How have the media added to the misrepresentation of sharks and hindered shark conservation efforts?





ACTIVITY FOUR: LET'S SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

This activity supports a discussion around animals that are dangerous to humans. The aim is to help pupils think through the risks.

On average, what animal causes most human deaths every year: peanuts, hippos, icicles or sharks?

It's a light-hearted approach to assessing risk, but linked to the much more serious understanding of what causes the highest number of global human fatalities every year. Sensitivity is obviously needed even with this approach.

Please note: This is not a list of the top ten things most deadly to humans, it's just an interesting selection!

- Get initial responses to the challenge.
- Then let pupils discuss between themselves.
- Then feedback the order and numbers of the dangers to humans.

The statistics:

Animal	Average number of human deaths they cause around the world each year
MOSQUITOES	1,000,000
SNAKES	50,000
DOGS	25,000
HIPPOS	2,000
CROCODILES	1,000
COWS	200
TIGERS	90
LIONS	70
BEARS	20
SHARKS	6

Discussion questions:

- Are you surprised by this information?
Did you expect some animals to be more / less dangerous?
- How do you think these facts will help you to challenge the stereotype of sharks and 'myth-bust'?





WHAT WAS THE FILM ABOUT?

In 1975, the film *Jaws* (12A) was released, directed by Steven Spielberg and based on the sensational book by Peter Benchley.

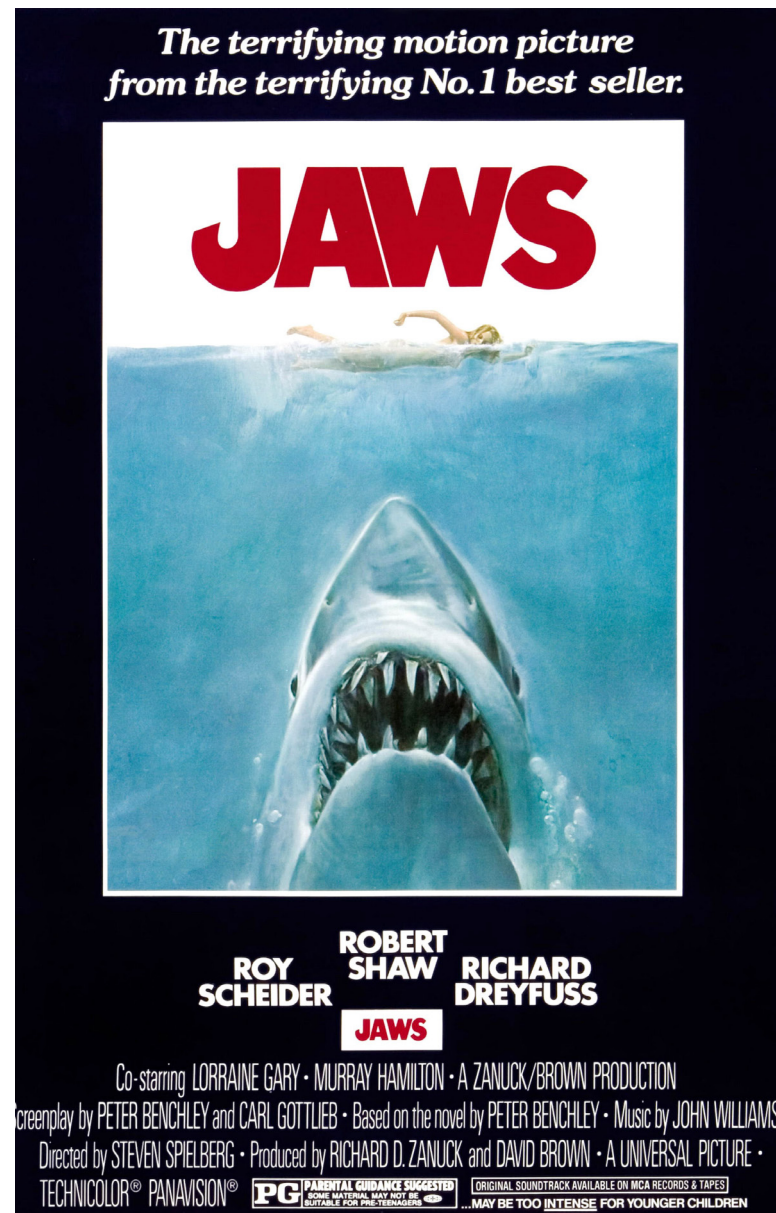
It told the story of a great white 'man-eating' shark that terrorises beachgoers in the USA, kills six people and seems to hold a grudge. It was a box office smash – the highest-grossing film of all time until *Star Wars* came along.

On the right is the original advertising poster. Just like the film it was designed to terrify people and, just like the film, it misrepresented sharks in order to exaggerate the danger.

WHAT IMMEDIATE IMPACT DID THE FILM HAVE?

Jaws had a monstrous effect on the image of sharks, and made people around the world scared of sharks and terrified to swim in the sea. There was a huge increase – a “feeding frenzy” according to Steven Spielberg – of people going out to hunt sharks for sport on the east coast of the US, where the film is set.

George Burgess, former director of the Florida Program for Shark Research, explained: “You didn’t have to have a fancy boat or gear – an average Joe could catch big fish, and there was no remorse, since there was this mind-set that they were man-killers.”



WHAT LONG-TERM IMPACT DID THE FILM HAVE?

Perhaps more importantly, the film was instrumental in creating the image in our minds of sharks as dangerous animals that are out to kill us. A survey by Bite-Back revealed that even now:

- Nearly half (46%) of all Brits think sharks are more terrifying than spiders, snakes and rodents combined.
- 64% of British people would “prefer sharks not to exist”.

Now there’s genuine concern that this often-repeated, yet unfounded, image is standing in the way of shark conservation efforts.

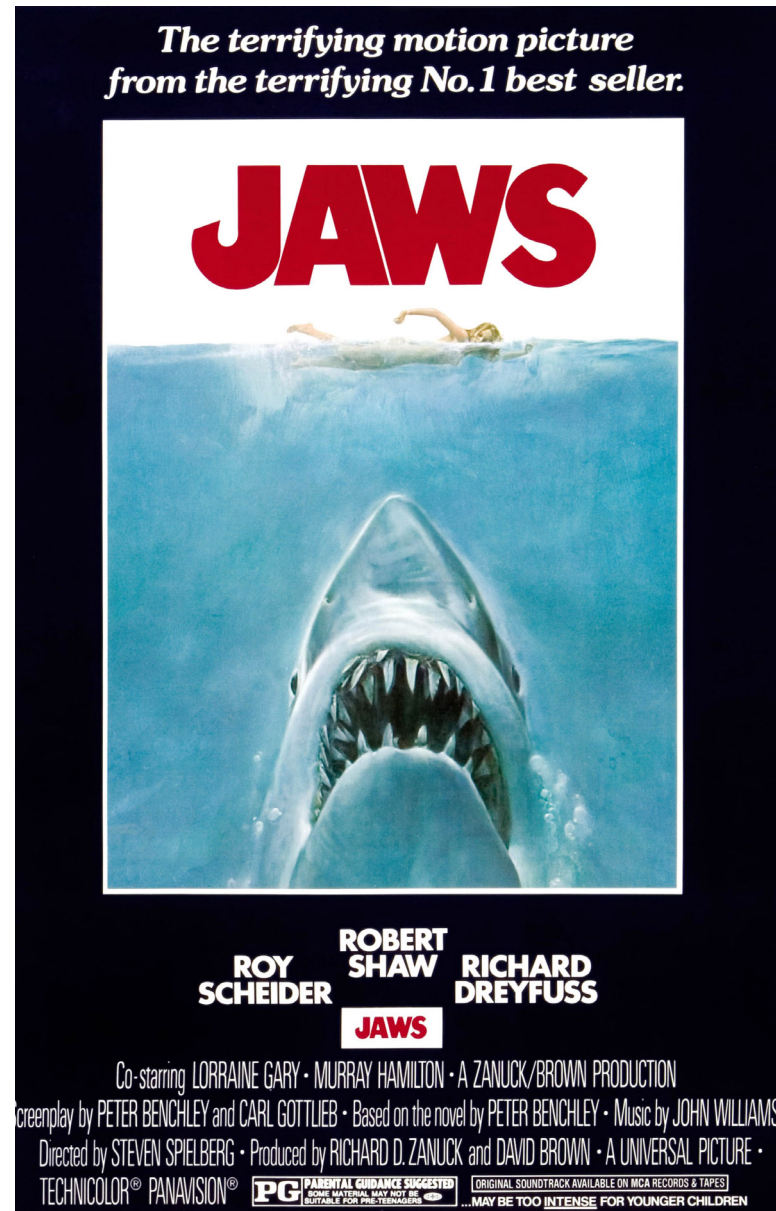
“Knowing what I know now, I could never write that book today,” the author of *Jaws* talking about the hatred shown towards sharks in the aftermath of the film.





Have a close look at the original advertising poster for the film *Jaws* (12A) that came out in 1975.

Write down all the ways you think the poster has been designed to give a misleading image of sharks in order to **feed the fear**.





CHARACTER OR CARICATURE?

What fictional shark characters have you come across in books, films or songs? What part do they play in the story? Are they 'baddies' or 'goodies'?



The shark character	The film/book/song	What does the character do?	Goodie or baddie?

Overall, what impression do these characters create? Do you think they have shaped your own opinion of sharks?

Food for thought

Why do we need 'baddies' in fiction?





HEADLINE HYSTERIA

We expect news reports to be truthful, accurate and impartial but, when it comes to stories about sharks, the reporting doesn't always live up to the ideals. Even the choice of individual words – in particular the **adjectives** – makes a difference and can skew a story.

Have a look at the headlines below.



Shock tactics have been used in these headlines to increase the drama of the stories and entice people to read on. It's particularly common online, where exaggerated headlines like this are called **clickbait** – (a suitably fishy term).

Clickbait – A sensationalised headline that encourages readers to click on a link

Circle the words in the headlines below that create a negative picture of sharks.

Terrifying new species of shark is discovered in the Atlantic Ocean that has ancestors older than dinosaurs

Terrifying moment fearsome tiger shark weaves its way between unsuspecting beachgoers at popular beach

Terrifying snap shows HUGE shark lurking just feet from kayaker

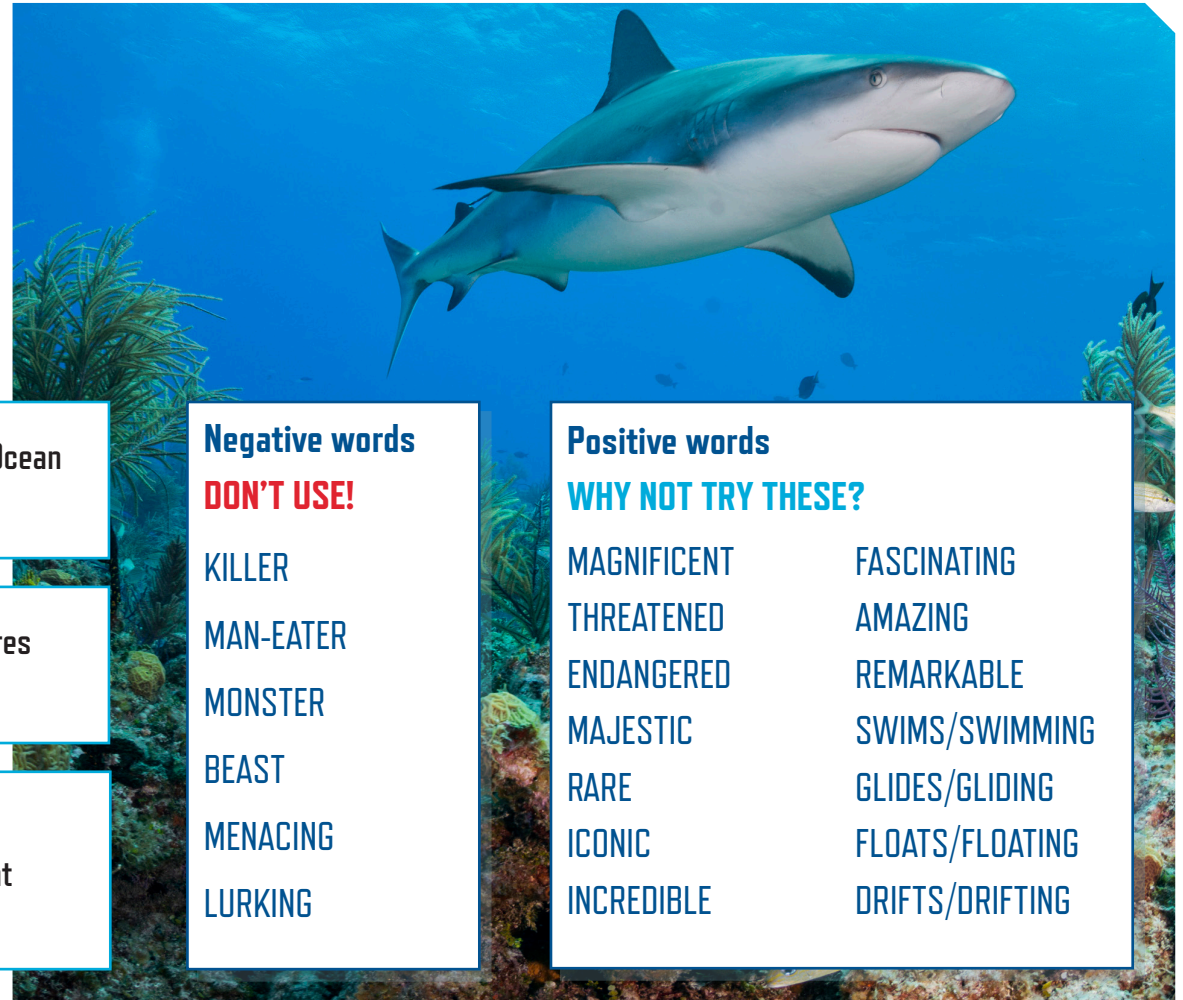




NOW HAVE SOME FUN

WORDS MATTER: 'GET IT WRITE'

Replace the words from the three headlines below to create a completely different image of the shark in the story. You'll find some suggestions in the boxes below – or come up with your own!



_____ new species of shark is discovered in the Atlantic Ocean
that has ancestors older than dinosaurs.

_____ photo shows _____ shark _____ just metres
from kayaker off Cornwall coast

_____ moment _____ tiger shark
_____ its way between _____ beachgoers at
popular beach

Negative words DON'T USE!

KILLER
MAN-EATER
MONSTER
BEAST
MENACING
LURKING

Positive words WHY NOT TRY THESE?

MAGNIFICENT	FASCINATING
THREATENED	AMAZING
ENDANGERED	REMARKABLE
MAJESTIC	SWIMS/SWIMMING
RARE	GLIDES/GLIDING
ICONIC	FLOATS/FLOATING
INCREDIBLE	DRIFTS/DRIFTING

Food for thought

Should adjectives be used in headlines? Are they needed? What effect does it have when the journalist uses them?





LET'S SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Here is a list of the average number of deaths caused by certain animals or objects around the world each year. Can you guess how deadly they are? Place the animal or object next to the correct number.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

This is **NOT** a list of the top ten things most deadly to humans, it's just an interesting selection!

Choose from



Lions



Crocodiles



Cows



Dogs



Snakes



Sharks



Tigers




Mosquitoes



Hippos



Bears

Animal	Average number of human deaths they cause around the world each year 
	1,000,000
	50,000
	25,000
	2,000
	1,000
	200
	90
	70
	20
	6

