

Teacher's notes

Jaws

by Peter Benchley



SUMMARY

Jaws, Peter Benchley's story of a man-eating shark, is famous all over the world. Its fame comes from the film 'Jaws', made in 1975 and directed by Steven Spielberg. 'Jaws' is one of the most exciting, frightening films ever made. But the novel from which the film was taken is itself hugely exciting and frightening. Since it was written in 1974, it has sold over 5.5 million copies.

The novel *Jaws* tells the story of a monster fish, a Great White Shark, that starts attacking swimmers off the coast of America. The scene is the sleepy coastal island of Amity, near New York, where tourism is the main business. At first, when a Great White Shark attacks and kills a young woman, the businessmen who run Amity do not want to close the beaches down - if they do, the tourists will stay away and the town will lose money. No warning about the shark is given to tourists, therefore, and children and adults continue to swim in the sea. However, soon a small boy is killed by the shark - and then two more people are killed...

Brody, the local chief of police, closes down the beaches. From now on, the story becomes a hunt for the shark by three men - Brody himself, a young scientist called Matt Hooper, and a tough fisherman called Quint. The three go out in Quint's boat, and a terrifying battle begins between the shark and the men...

ABOUT PETER BENCHLEY

Born in 1940, Peter Benchley belongs to one of America's most celebrated literary families. His grandfather was the humorist Robert Benchley and his father the novelist Nathaniel Benchley. In his twenties Peter Benchley became a successful journalist. It was in 1974, with the publication of his first novel, *Jaws*, that he became a novelist, like his father. He then went on to collaborate with Carl Gottlieb on the screenplay of the film 'Jaws'. He also played a small part in the film itself.

Benchley's interest in the sea began at the age of nine during summers on the east coast of America, and all his novels reflect this fascination with the sea. Much of the author's success is due to the meticulous research that goes into his novels. Since the success of *Jaws*, Benchley

has gone on to write a number of other bestsellers, including *The Deep*, *Island* and *The Beast*.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Peter Benchley has studied sharks since he was a child - 'They were no great secret to me,' he said in an interview. He got the idea of *Jaws* from a newspaper article about a man who caught a 400 lb Great White Shark off Long Island (near New York). Benchley thought to himself, 'What would happen if one of those things came into a beach and wouldn't go away? The idea just lingered ...'. Benchley wrote the book easily - it was the title of the novel that he couldn't decide upon. It was only twenty minutes before the book went into production that he and his editor agreed on the word *Jaws*. The rest is history!

Jaws is a terrific novel; a terrific story. For an explanation of its huge success, one could turn to the words of Peter Benchley himself: 'I think I have finally found an answer to the issue of why it [*Jaws*] was so successful and why it has lingered... . We do not just fear our predators, we are transfixed by them. We are prone to weave stories and fables and chat endlessly about them... In a deeply tribal sense, we love our monsters, and I think that is the key to it right there. It is monsters, it is learning about them, it is both thrill and safety. You can think about them without being desperately afraid, because they are not going to come into your living room and eat you. That is *Jaws*.'

ABOUT THE FILM

'Jaws' was Steven Spielberg's third film and it made him instantly famous. Today, 22 years later, one only has to say the word 'Jaws', and people start humming the film music. The film has grossed \$300 million worldwide. It has had three sequels, and won an Oscar for Best Original Score.

The film starred Richard Dreyfuss as shark scientist Matt Hooper, Roy Scheider as policeman Brody, and Robert Shaw as fisherman Quint.

What was it about the film 'Jaws' that so caught the world's attention? A great deal of the film's attraction was

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that when the monster rose up out of the sea, with its teeth flashing, it seemed terrifyingly real. In fact, for most of the shots of the shark, a mechanical shark was used. The film was extremely difficult to make. Three models of the shark were used - and they all kept sinking. The boats which were used in the film also kept sinking. Because of all these problems, the film went a long way over budget. After a whole day spent on the water, the production crew sometimes ended up with only twelve seconds of film. However, it was well worth the effort!

It was not just the special effects which made the film so fascinating to watch. The characterization was superb, and the timing brilliantly calculated. It was in this movie that Spielberg first showed his genius for making thrillers with a 'human heart'.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- Put students into pairs. Students choose two pictures from the book and describe them to another pair. The other pair must find the pictures.
- Divide the class into those who have seen the film 'Jaws' and those who have not. Put students in pairs or groups, pairing a student who has seen the film with a student (or students) who hasn't. The student who has not seen the film asks questions about the film and the other student replies.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1-3

- Put students into pairs. Ask them to talk about these questions.
 - Where do we usually find sharks?
 - What is different about the shark in this story?
 - Which is the most dangerous fish or animal in the sea, do you think? Say why.
 - Which are the three most dangerous animals in the world, do you think? Say why.
 - Which animal are you most frightened of? Say why.
- Put students into pairs. They act out the following. One student is Brody. One student is the man with the child in chapter 3. He saw the shark pull the boy down. He tells Brody what he saw.

Chapters 4-6

Put students into pairs. They are the police boss and another policeman in Amity. They think about the problem of the shark.

What will they do about the shark? Will they do the same as Brody?

Chapters 7-10

- Teach students the word *brave*. Put them into small groups. Ask them to discuss this question:

Do you think Hooper was a stupid man, a brave man, or both?

Say why you think this.
- Put students into pairs. Ask them to write down the important things that happen in these chapters. Then they find another pair and compare and discuss answers. Then as a whole class activity, write on the board the most important things.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Put students into pairs. Ask them to choose a new title for each chapter. Then as a whole-class activity, elicit the titles and write them on the board. Students then vote for the best title for each chapter.
- In pairs, students discuss the following questions.
 - Did you enjoy *Jaws*? Say why/why not.
 - Which chapters did you like best? Which chapters didn't you like? Say why.
 - Do you think men like this kind of story more than women do?
 - Would you like to read another story by Peter Benchley?
 - Why is the story called *Jaws*, do you think?

Glossary

It will be useful for students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the reader. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1-3

attack (v) to fight against somebody and hurt them

cry out (v) to make a noise when you are afraid

drop (v) to go down quickly

harpoon (n) this is very long and has a knife on the end; it kills big fish

pick up (v) to take in your hand or mouth

point (v) to put your finger to a place

shark (n) a very big, dangerous fish with lots of teeth

shore (n) the flat ground next to the sea

surface (n) the top of

towards (prep) on the way to

Chapters 4-6

(to fall) **overboard** (adv) (to fall) out of a boat into the water

Chapters 7-10

barrel (n) this is wooden and stays on top of the water; you put things in it

cage (n) when people have birds in their houses they keep them in a cage



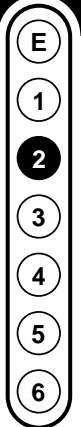
Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.



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Activities before reading the book

- Read the Introduction in your book. Then talk to another student. Answer these questions.
 - Are you afraid of sharks?
 - Some people swim in the sea when they know sharks can come there. Do you?
- In the story, a young boy goes into the sea. What do you think happens to him? Write your answer.

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-3

Chapter 1

- Are these sentences right or wrong?
 - The house is on the beach.
 - The man and the woman both go swimming.
 - The shark can see the woman.
 - The woman feels afraid but doesn't know why.
 - The shark attacks the woman's leg.
 - The man goes to sleep on the beach.
 - The woman returns to the house.
 - The men phone the police.
- Work with another student.
You are Jack and a policeman. Jack telephones the policeman. Have the conversation.

Chapter 2

- Use these words to finish the sentences.
businessman, the *Amity Leader*, policeman, wife, sharks, dead woman
 - Hendricks is a
 - Tom Cassidy is a friend of the
 - Harry Meadows writes for
 - Matt Hooper knows everything about
 - Larry Vaughan is a
 - Ellen is Brody's
- Answer these questions.
 - Why do Brody and Hendricks go to the beach?
 - Why does Hendricks cry out?
 - Why does Brody think a shark attacked the woman, do you think?
 - Why does Matt Hooper think it's a Great White Shark?
 - Why isn't Harry Meadows going to write about the accident in his newspaper?

- Why doesn't Larry Vaughan want Brody to close the beaches?
 - Why doesn't Brody close the beaches?
- Work with another student. Talk about these questions.
 - Do you think Brody is right when he doesn't close the beaches?
 - You are Brody. What will you do about the shark?
 - What do you think will happen next?

Chapter 3

- Who says these things? Why do they say them?
 - 'Can I go swimming?'
 - 'Did you see that?'
 - 'I didn't do my job.'
 - 'This was a man, an old man, five minutes ago.'
 - 'He thinks it's a Great White.'
 - 'We can put food in the water for the shark.'
 - 'You knew it was dangerous!'
 - 'It's a long story.'
- Write the conversation between Brody and his wife when he gets home.

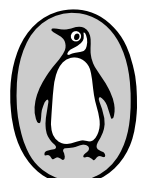
CHAPTERS 4-6

Chapter 4

- Answer these questions.
 - Why do Brody and Hendricks go and look for Ben Gardner?
 - What do they find out about Gardner? How did it happen? How do they know this?
 - What does Brody want to happen to the shark?
 - Who does Meadows think can help? What is this man's job?
- Talk with another student.
What does Larry Vaughan want? Do you think he is right?
- Work with another student. Make the conversation between Brody and Hooper about the shark.

Chapter 5

- Finish these sentences.
 - Hooper doesn't think the shark is there because
 - Vaughan wants Brody to open the beaches because
 - Brody wants Hooper to go up and down in the boat because



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- (d) People don't go into the sea because
 - (e) Brody tells the boy to come in because
 - (f) The boy tries to run out of the water because
 - (g) Brody closes the beach because
- 2 You work for a New York newspaper. You are in Amity. Write about Amity and the shark attacks.

Chapter 6

- 1 Who says these words? What are the answers to these questions?
- (a) 'Can this man Quint help us?'
 - (b) 'Did it kill anybody?'
 - (c) 'Can you help us?'
 - (d) 'Can you start tomorrow?'
 - (e) 'Can you swim?'
 - (f) 'Do you want to come?'
- 2 Answer these questions.
- (a) What do you know about these men: Brody, Hooper, Quint?
 - (b) What do you think of them? Do you like them? Say why.

CHAPTERS 7-10

Chapter 7

- 1 Answer these questions.
- (a) What does the shark do to the fishing lines?
 - (b) Why do the men drop meat into the water?
 - (c) How big is the shark's head?
 - (d) How big does Quint think the shark is?
 - (e) Why do the men think the shark is going to attack the boat?
 - (f) Why does Brody say, 'That thing isn't a fish'?
 - (g) What do we learn about Quint in this chapter?
- 2 Talk with another student.
- (a) How do these men - Brody, Hooper and Quint - feel about the shark? Do they all feel the same?
 - (b) Do you think you could go out in a boat and kill a shark like this one? Say why/why not.

Chapter 8

- 1 Put the right word in these sentences.
- dangerous, kill, overboard, pictures, pay, fall over, cage, boat
- Hooper wants to take a (i) on to the boat. He wants to take (ii) of the fish. Quint doesn't want him to do it because he says it is very (iii)

But Hooper says he will (iv) Quint, and Quint agrees. The three men go out in the (v) and they see the shark. The shark goes below the boat and the three men (vi) Hooper wants to put the cage (vii) and go down in it. He wants to do this because he thinks he can (viii) the fish. Brody and Quint do not like it but they agree.

- 2 Write a description of the men in the picture on page 25.
- 3 Work with another student.
What do you think will happen now? Who will win the fight: the men or the shark?
Write down your answer.

Chapter 9

- 1 Answer these questions.
- (a) What happens to Hooper? Why does it happen?
 - (b) What is Quint going to do?
 - (c) Why do you think he wants to do this?
 - (d) What is Brody going to do the next day and why?
 - (e) How does his wife feel?
- 2 Talk with another student. Look up *imagine* in your dictionary.
Quint and Brody want to catch the shark. They are going out in the boat the next day. Imagine that you are with Quint or Brody. Will you go out in the boat?

Chapter 10

- 1 Answer these questions:
- (a) Why does Quint put barrels on the harpoon line?
 - (b) What does the shark do to the boat?
 - (c) How does Quint kill the shark?
 - (d) How is this shark unusual?
 - (e) How does Quint die?
 - (f) How does Brody get back to the shore?
- 2 Talk to another student.
You are Brody and Brody's wife. Brody tells his wife the story of how Quint and the shark died.

Activities after reading the book

Find the word *hero* in your dictionary. Who do you think is the hero of the book? Why?

