

## *Keepers of the Ocean*



## A Read the text

*The water stretches to the horizon, breaking the silence with nothing but the soft pounding of waves. Its mirroring surface conceals a world within. Myriads of sea creatures live in its vastness, from the schools of tiniest krill to the blue, slow – paced giants.*

*The misty line between the water and the air divides two worlds and it seems as they do not really coexist – the world within has its own rules and its inhabitants abide by them without being aware of the stirrings caused by the creatures that live on the other side. Suddenly, the boundary is broken by a knife-like fin which ominously glides in circles, inspecting whomever is unfortunate enough to draw its attention.*

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Ever since Peter Benchley wrote *Jaws* and Spielberg made an iconic film bearing the same title, sharks are considered to be terrifying killing machines, hidden within the dark depths, lurking for their victims. Their predatory skills is what scares us the most about sharks. They are silent, quick and effective, and they rarely hesitate once they pick out their target. When they attack they protect their eyes by covering them with a membrane making the only vulnerable part of their body impenetrable. Not only can the sharks protect themselves effectively, they can detect blood within a long range, so any injured living being that finds itself in deep waters is not safe from their keen senses. Once they decide to feed, they can easily dislocate their jaws and grab their prey with an enormous set of predatory teeth. Lots of Hollywood films depict sharks who swim around in circles before they attack. The scene is usually accompanied by ominous music and close-up camera shots which is not for the faint-hearted viewers, as it makes them feel they're right there, in the water, about to be attacked.



In real life, sharks do make circles around the unknown objects or beings, but not necessarily to attack them. Sharks are very curious animals and they rely on their keen senses. Not only can they smell even the tiniest drops of blood, they can also catch electrical impulses and vibrations emitted by living beings. That is how sharks learn more about their potential soon-to-be meals. Therefore, before closing in on their prey, sharks quickly decide whether it's worth it or not, which sometimes helps certain animals to stay off their menu. When it comes to people, there has been a number of shark attacks which mostly occur on the popular beaches of Australia, South Africa, even Hawaii. Several of the recorded incidents ended fatally, especially the ones caused by Great Whites, one of the biggest and most dangerous predators on Earth. The very thought of a several-metre-long fish approaching a human can cause fear, panic and hysteria. Filmmakers who made *Jaws* were well aware of this fact. In 1979, after the film hit the box-office, quite a number of people approached the ocean with caution they had never felt before, and the effect was nearly dramatic – sharks became the true *villains* of the sea. Indeed, they've killed so many people, haven't they?

After the *Jaws* were made, several other films used the idea and depicted sharks as the ultimate evil that has no other purpose in life than to snatch and devour innocent swimmers. This idea alone was enough to open a hunting season on sharks in order to "keep the oceans safe". However, this is far from being true. In reality, sharks rarely attack people. Not because they're afraid of us or aren't sufficiently smart hunters, but simply because they don't find humans good enough to be their meal. Take Great Whites, for example. They usually eat larger fish, seals or smaller species of whales whose bodies are full of fat which is crucial for sharks' energy. Humans just aren't built that way, so sharks would rather leave them off their menu. In fact, most of the shark attacks on people happen because sharks confuse humans for seals or turtles, which is why surfers are usually their most common human prey. Humans who swim on their surfing boards and paddle with their arms appear to sharks as their usual prey, so sharks mistakenly charge, which sometimes ends fatally.





Scientists also noticed that in recent years sharks have been approaching the ocean shores more often in search for food, since fishing and destroying marine life is rapidly depleting fish stocks on which they usually feed. In most cases, however, humans are left alone, and sharks disappointingly go away in search for better food. On the other hand, humans do not yield so quickly when they hunt. So far, for every human killed by a shark, people killed two million sharks of different species for a variety of reasons. Not only do

people kill because of fear, they also kill to show their power, they kill for "sport" or simply for food. The latter is the cause of death of more than hundreds of millions of sharks yearly – as they are considered to be a culinary specialty, shark's fins are being cut off while the animal is still alive. Then the animal is thrown back into the ocean, where it is left to die in excruciating pain from bleeding and starvation. This extremely cruel procedure is called finning. One has to think about who the real predator here is.

The environmental impact that resulted from the mass killings of sharks is enormous. Sharks are the apex predators of oceans. They keep other aggressive fish species at bay, which in turn, control the population of other smaller sea creatures. The extinction of apex predators means the imminent disturbance of the global ecosystem. When marine researchers began explaining the devastating effect of shark hunt to the public, the damage had already been done. Even Peter Benchley, the author of the book *Jaws* started to call for their conservation. Appalled by the impact his work had on these animals, Benchley regretted his initial take on sharks, claiming he learned a lot in the process, which has little to do with its famous interpretation of the animal. Furthermore, he claimed his new story would be quite the opposite – sharks would not be depicted as mindless monsters. "No, the shark in an updated *Jaws* could not be the villain; it would have to be written as the victim, for, worldwide, sharks are much more the oppressed than the oppressors." said Benchley.

Mass hysteria has recently subsided to a certain extent, however, sharks are still being mercilessly killed, despite scientists' warnings. The World Ocean is being threatened by the fact that people don't take responsibilities for their actions. These fearsome and magnificent animals are here for a reason, and that reason should surpass our mindless need for exploitation.

Sharks may be dangerous, but not as nearly as humans. When they attack us, they simply assume we are something else. When we attack them, however, we do it more efficiently, reducing them by numbers. What we aren't aware of, or we simply don't care, is the fact that we are destroying the environment on a global scale, which in return, will ultimately destroy us too. Sharks are predators, and in some cases, they may be villains too. But the truth is, sharks are also the keepers of the World Ocean which, in turn, is the source and the quiet supporter of every living being on this planet.

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*The large fin still cuts through the ocean's surface. It slowly approaches its prey trapped in the middle of the circle. The panic ensues and the victim starts to shiver uncontrollably. Nothing else can be heard but the waves trickling over the edges of the shark's body. The Great White shark. It is ready to submerge completely. The fin becomes smaller, and the waves around it blend with the closing surface. The prey prepares for the worst and keeps on waiting. Nothing else can be done.*

*However, nothing happens. The shark makes a swift turn and slowly swims away, ignoring the terrified being and leaving it only to the deep blue depths and the soft murmur of the water.*

## GLOSSARY\*:

**conceal** – to hide

**myriads** – countless or extremely great in number

**krill** – a small planktonic animal of the open seas

**stirrings** – signs of activity, movement, or emotion

**ominous** – threatening

**dislocate** – to move from its normal position

**depict** – to portray, describe

**faint-hearted** – lacking courage, timid

**deplete** – diminished in number or quantity

**yield** – to give way under force or pressure

**excruciating** – extremely painful

**impact** – a strong effect on someone or something

**(keep) at bay** – cornered, controlled

**imminent** – about to happen

**disturbance** – a breakdown of peaceful behaviour

**surpass** – become better than

**shiver** – to shake slightly and uncontrollably as a result of being cold, frightened, or excited

**trickling** – flowing in a small stream

**murmur** – making a low continuous sound

\* Words and expressions have been looked up in the Cambridge online dictionary. Some of them have been partially modified (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>).

## **B** Answer the questions and discuss.

- 1 Explain the differences between the popular image of a shark created by the media and the actual shark.
- 2 How can you relate environmental issues with fishing and hunting of sharks?
- 3 What does it mean to be "the apex predator"?
- 4 Why are sharks often referred to as the killing machines?



## **WRITING** .....

## **C** Write a letter!

Imagine you are an environmental activist. Your goal is to appeal to the government to protect the sharks. Explain the sharks' role in the ecosystem. Suggest the importance of education. Your letter should consist of no more than 250 words.

Key words that can help you:

- *finning*
- *environment*
- *cruelty-free*
- *educate*
- *preserve*
- *ecosystem*
- *endangered*

## **EYEXPLORE!**.....

## **D** Find Deep Blue!

Deep Blue is a 50-years-old female great white shark, famous for its age and length. She is around 7 meters long and can be found in the waters around Mexico. Find a video of a human – Deep Blue encounter online.

**E** Try to match the shark species according to their description. Find the answers online.

- 1** When \_\_\_\_\_ is born, it has dark stripes on the upper side of its body which fade as the shark gets older. It is known to eat just about anything: from birds, turtles, others sharks to garbage like metal plates, machine parts and clothes.
- 2** \_\_\_\_\_ is the fastest shark in the world. It can average an incredible 96 km/h when hunting for prey! This shark can even jump out of the ocean's surface.
- 3** \_\_\_\_\_ can swim in both salt and fresh water and it is found in various seas and rivers around the world. It has even been seen travelling up the Mississippi River. It is known for its aggressive nature.
- 4** \_\_\_\_\_ is the largest known fish. It feeds almost exclusively on plankton and is not known to pose a threat to humans.
- 5** \_\_\_\_\_ has eyes on far sides of its wide head. It uses those eyes to scan ocean area more effectively than other sharks. Its favourite meal are stingrays.



## KEY - Task E

1 Tiger shark

2 Shortfin mako

3 Bull shark

4 Whale shark

5 Hammerhead