About the author

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 movie *Jaws*. He also played a small part in the movie 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*.

Summary

*Jaws*, Peter Benchley’s story of a man-eating shark, is famous all over the world. Its fame comes from the movie *Jaws*, made in 1975 and directed by Steven Spielberg. *Jaws* is one of the most exciting, frightening movies ever made. But the novel on which the movie was based 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.

Part one

**Chapter 1**

A shark is swimming near the shore. A young woman goes for a night swim. Then she goes missing.

**Chapter 2**

The next morning, the police are notified that a young woman called Chrissie is missing, and they find her mangled remains on the beach. The Police Chief Brody wants his friend Meadows to write a newspaper article about the shark attack and close the beaches, but the local people don’t want this as Amity is heavily dependent on tourism.

**Chapter 3**

No warning about the shark is given to tourists, therefore, and children and adults continue to swim in the sea. Soon a small boy called Alex Kintner and an old man are killed by the shark. Now there are some newspaper articles on the shark attacks. Mrs. Kintner accuses Brody.

**Chapter 4**

Ben Gardner goes out to sea to look for the shark, but he doesn’t come back. Brody, despite his fear of water, goes out with Hendricks to see Gardner on his boat, *Flicka*. But Gardner wasn’t on the boat. Hendricks finds a big white tooth in one of the holes in the boat. Brody meets Meadows and Hooper, who think the tooth is from a Great White Shark, “the man-eater.” Brody insists on closing the beach and attempting to catch the shark.

**Chapter 5**

Brody asks Hooper to patrol in the boat near the beach as he has been forced to open the beaches by the local council. The shark almost gets a boy.

**Chapter 6**

Brody asks Quint, a fisherman, to kill the shark. Quint wants a lot of money and two men to help him. Brody doesn’t feel comfortable going out to sea, but he and Hooper agree to join Quint.

Part two

**Chapter 7**

This chapter describes the hunt for the shark by three men—Brody, Hooper, and Quint. The three go out in Quint’s boat, and they see the huge shark on the first day.

**Chapter 8**

On the second day, Hooper brings a shark-cage. The three argue when they lose track of the shark, and Hooper goes down into the water in the cage to attract the shark back.

**Chapter 9**

Hooper in the cage brings the shark near to the boat, but it destroys the cage and kills Hooper. Quint is determined to kill the shark. Brody tells his wife Ellen about Hooper’s death when he arrives home that night.
Chapter 10

On the third day, Quint and Brody use barrels and harpoon lines to fight against the shark. The terrible battle causes the terrifying death of Quint, but in the end the shark dies from the wounds it receives during the battle. Only Brody survives and goes back to the shore.

Background and themes

Peter Benchley got the idea of *Jaws* from a newspaper article about a man who caught a 4,400 lb (2,000 kilogram) Great White Shark off Long Island (near New York). Benchley thought to himself, “What would happen if one of those things came in to 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 title, *Jaws*. The rest is history!

**Sharks:** Peter Benchley has studied sharks since he was a child. He said, “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.”

**Bravery:** The story shows the bravery of the men who fight a terrible battle against the shark. Brody, especially, stands out as he has to close the beaches even though the town has to make money out of the tourists, and he goes out to sea for the battle between the shark and the men even though he doesn’t want to or have to go.

**Thrill and safety:** According to Peter Benchley, the key to the story is both “thrill and safety”. You can think about sharks without being desperately afraid, because they are not going to come into your living room and eat you.

About the movie

*Jaws* was Steven Spielberg’s third movie and it made him instantly famous. Even today, one only has to say the word *jaws*, and people start humming the theme music. The movie has grossed US$300 million worldwide. It has had three sequels, and won an Oscar for Best Original Score.

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

What was it about the movie *Jaws* that so caught the world’s attention? A great deal of the movie’s attraction was 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 movie was extremely difficult to make. Three models of the shark were used—and they all kept sinking. The boats which were used in the movie also kept sinking. Because of all these problems, the movie 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 the movie. However, it was well worth the effort!

It was not just the special effects which made the movie 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.”

Discussion activities

**Chapters 1–3**

**Before reading**

1. **Discuss:** Talk about the movie *Jaws*.
   Divide the class into those who have seen the movie *Jaws* and those who have not. Put students in pairs or groups, pairing a student who has seen the movie with a student (or students) who hasn’t. The student who has not seen the movie asks questions about the movie and the other student replies.

2. **Describe:** Put students into pairs. Have each pair choose two pictures from the book and describe them to another pair. The other pair must find the pictures.

**After reading**

3. **Discuss:** Talk about sharks and other dangerous animals. Put students into pairs. Have them talk about the following questions.
   - Where do we usually find sharks?
   - What is different about the shark in this story?
   - Name any fish or animals in the sea you know. Which is the most dangerous fish or animal in the sea, do you think? Say why.
   - What are the three most dangerous animals in the world, do you think? Say why.
   - Which animal are you most frightened of? Say why.

4. **Role play:** Put students into pairs. Have them act out the conversation between Brody and the man with the child in Chapter 3. This man saw the shark pull the boy down. He tells Brody what he saw.

5. **Discuss:** Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions.
   - Do you think Brody is right when he doesn’t close the beaches?
   - You are Brody. What will you do about the shark?
Jaws

Chapters 4–6

Before reading
6 Describe: Have students look at the pictures on pages 13 and 17. Ask them to describe the pictures and guess what happens in the story.

After reading
7 Discuss: Have students work in pairs or small groups to talk about the police actions.
   You are a policeman in Amity. You think about the problem of the shark. What will you do about the shark? Will you do the same as Brody?
8 Write: Have students work in groups to write a newspaper article.
   You work for a New York newspaper. You are in Amity. Write about Amity and the shark attacks. The headline is SHARK ATTACK KILLS TWO IN AMITY.
9 Describe: Put students into small groups. Have them talk about what they know about the characters: Brody, Hooper, and Quint. Later, have each group describe the characters to the rest of the class who have to say which character is being described.

Chapter 7

Before reading
10 Artwork: Have students work in small groups. Encourage them to imagine the fight between the shark and the three men. Ask them to draw a picture of this shark or the battle itself. When they are ready, ask them to make a presentation to describe what they draw and what they think will happen from now on.

After reading
11 Discuss: Put students into small groups to discuss the following questions.
   • How do these men—Brody, Hooper, and Quint—feel about the shark? Do they all feel the same?
   • Do you think you could go out in a boat and kill a shark like this one? Say why / why not.

Chapter 8

After reading
12 Discuss: Talk about Matt Hooper. Have students look up the word brave in their dictionaries. Put them into small groups. Ask them if they think that Matt Hooper was a stupid man, a brave man, or both, and why they think so.

Chapter 9

Before reading
13 Predict: Have a whole-class discussion. Ask them what they think will happen now. What is Hooper going to do? What will happen to the cage?

After reading
14 Re-tell and check: Put students into pairs. Have them re-tell what happened in this chapter and check whether their predictions (Activity 13) were right.

Chapter 10

Before reading
15 Describe and predict: Have students look at the picture on page 31. Ask some students to describe the picture. Then ask, Who will win the fight, the men or the shark? Now we know Hooper was killed, do you think Brody is going to get killed? How about Quint? Have students discuss these questions in small groups, and then ask them to share their opinions with the rest of the class.

After reading
16 Role play: Put students into pairs. Have them think of the conversation between Brody and Ellen, Brody’s wife after he comes back. Brody tells her how Quint and the shark died.
17 Discuss: Talk about the important events in part two. Put students into pairs. Have them discuss and choose the important things that happen in these chapters. Then guide them to find another pair and compare and discuss their choices. Then as a whole-class activity, have them share their ideas and decide on the Best Five of the most important events in the last half of the story.

Extra activities
18 Discuss: Have students work in pairs to talk about the story using the following questions.
   • Did you enjoy Jaws? Why / why not?
   • Which chapters did you like best? Which chapters didn’t you like? 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?
19 Discuss: Talk about the chapter titles.
   Put students into pairs or small groups. Have them to come up with 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.
20 Discuss: Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions.
   • Are you afraid of sharks?
   • Some people swim in the sea when they know sharks can come there. Do you?
21 Project: After reading the whole story, ask students to watch the movie Jaws as a homework assignment or in class. Later, have students discuss the differences between the book and the movie. Ask them which they prefer.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.