

# Jaws: shark and water essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Jaws (1975) Media Coursework Peter Benchley wrote “ Jaws” the novel before it was made into a film directed by Steven Spielberg. “ Jaws” is a thriller/horror with the main aim being to build up suspense and tension.

When making the film Jaws Steven Spielberg had to face the challenging task of translating Benchley’s popular novel into a hit movie whilst still maintaining the suspense created through the many textual devices used by Benchley, such as language techniques and sentence structure.

Spielberg managed use different camera angles and shots alongside lighting effects to create atmosphere and tension to pretty much the same effect. In the background he uses music and sound effects to add to the dramatic visual images he creates. Finally Steven Spielberg uses specific dialogue to show the victims feelings and emotions. The film jaws is a horror film focused on a great white shark which terrorises the beach of Amity island and kills anything in its way until finally the police chief Martin Brody brings together a select few to take on the shark and put an end to the terror and killings. The film uses frequent point of view shots to increase the viewer’s tension and give a sense of firsthand experience as well as hiding the appearance of the shark forcing viewers to use their imagination to form an idea of the shark’s appearance. This is a clever technique as it allows the viewers to imagine the shark as what they individually perceive as scary.

It also plays on the idea that the less you see the more you get. Because most of the time the audience is not actually shown the shark, Spielberg uses a repetitive background sound (non-diegetic sound) to alert the audience of potential danger or the sharks presence. This technique relies on the audience to subconsciously associate the sound to the shark’s presence

and can be later used to create false tension. The first time we hear this music is in the title sequence where the camera is at a point of view shot of the shark.

The shark, increases its speed in conjunction with the music's increasing in tempo, demonstrating the incredible speed that the shark is capable of moving and giving a sense of its power. Music in the film can also be used to deceive viewers such as in the first scene. Both the frame and soundtrack cut abruptly to a group of teenagers who are drinking alcohol and smoking annabis around a bonfire. In the background we hear the sound of a harmonica being played.

This seemingly calm scene lures the viewer into a sense of security as they see the youths socializing and the orangey glow of the bonfire represents warmth and a welcoming atmosphere. The bonfire being the dominant light source is interesting. Fire has a number of different meanings. Its use here resembles safety, casting away shadows. The teenagers are protected by this light, but their safety is compromised when they leave the proximity of the fire.

However, although it can provide warmth and comfort, it is often used to signify evil things such as hell, and the use of the fire could also be read as a warning signal of what is to come. Spielberg is again making us psychologically unstable and insecure. This scene is a pan shot which also suggest there is less likely to be action. As the scene progresses Chrisy, a young girl who has just been flirting with a guy at the bonfire runs away into a remote section of the beach while the young man is following her. Here the

lighting is much darker but the soft sound of waves still keeps the viewer relaxed.

As Chrissy runs towards the water it is as if she is leaving the safety of the fire because she is tempted to swim. At closer inspection this seems a very random act of temptation as if it was almost meant to happen. The guy following Chrissy is also acting upon his temptations. Later this could be interpreted as an occurring theme in the story. It is at this point the scene changes, as the pair is running Chrissie's initially humorous voice is replaced by the heavy atmosphere, the comforting orangey sunset is covered by the clouds and the guy passes out as Chrissie enters the water further increasing the sense of isolation. Another interesting point is as Chrissie is removing her clothes while running it is almost as she is leaving herself exposed to potential danger and making herself more vulnerable.

At this point as the viewer sees Chrissie isolated in the water they realise that she is facing danger only limited by their own imagination. As Chrissie continues swimming, the frame changes to a point of view shot, accompanied by the same music as in the opening shot. The audience's thoughts change immediately from the images of the cheerful beach party to the earlier reference of the shark in the opening sequence. This provides a very effective contrast. The audience's expectations are realised when Chrissie feels a sharp pain, and then begins splashing about in the water as she is attacked. The unseen shark thrashes her around in the water, and she eventually clings onto a buoy, making its bell ring, in a vain attempt to alert the nearby community.

After a final grasp for breath, she finally disappears under the surface of the water leaving the viewers with the burden of her death. The second victim of the shark is a young boy named Alex, this time the scene is set in along the beach, crowded with people enjoying the long Independence Day holiday. Also on the beach is police chief Brody with his own family. Sunbathers lie on the packed beach. This is a very unlikely place and time for an eventful scene.

Again the audience is fooled into a false sense of security. In a series of jump cuts we see normal events such as people going in and out of the water and we can hear a radio playing in the background. The young boy Alex enters the scene and asks his mother to see if he is permitted to go out on a raft for “ just ten more minutes”. This is another sign of temptation right before the attack. His mother gives him permission and he leaves for the water.

This to the audience seems like just another scene depicting the activities taking place on the beach. The scene cuts to a worried and suspicious Brody sitting in the sand. He nervously scans the shoreline. A young boy throws a stick for fetching by his black dog, the animal splashes and swims with a stick in its mouth. Alex floats on a bright yellow lilo further out than most of the swimmers, and a fat woman floats on her back.

The camera cuts back to Brody as he looks out at the water’s horizon and passersby block his view. This along with the ongoing non-diegetic sound also serves to lower the viewer’s awareness. Here a few false alarms are sighted. These effectively and skilfully build the viewers expectations, tension and suspense. An elderly swimmers greyish coloured bathing cap is

mistaken for a shark fin as he swims up behind the floating woman. A man then come and kneels in front of Brody in order to talk to him about a problem while simultaneously blocking his view, Brody cranes his eyes above the man's shoulder in a point of view shot to maintain an unobstructed view.

A young girl's scream fools the "uptight" Brody into thinking the shark is attacking her. He sits back in relief, as he realises it is her boyfriend lifting her on his shoulders. The elderly man with the greyish bathing cap sits down in front of Brody and questions him about his reluctance to get wet again serving as a distraction. Kids splash and scream in the foreground of the water, while Alex floats further out. The next part of the film builds suspense through a sequence of quick cuts: the dog owner makes calls for his dog only to see the stick floating on the surface of the water.

This along with the previous false alerts make the viewer assume they have figured out what has happened to the dog allowing for them to take the bluff and expect something different to what they are about to see ergo making the following events more effective to an unsuspecting audience. The audience then get a familiar underwater view showing Alex's legs vulnerably kicking off the back of his raft. There is a momentary view of a giant fin slicing through the water. A strange shape surfaces beneath Alex's raft, grabbing him and overturning the raft.

A person on the beach remarks: "Did you see that?" causing a ripple of reaction. Blood gushes from Alex's body staining the water red and signifying a quick death unlike that of Chrissie, almost as if the shark is aware of its surrounding and adapts it killing to fit in with them. Alex

screams and then is dragged underwater and his yells turn to gurgles. As Brody realises this, his worst fears become a reality. A zoom (or push-pull) shot zeroes in on his shocked, recoiling face as he reacts to the distressing attack he has just witnessed. This is a rarely used shot but is effective when emphasising a sudden change in emotions.

He jumps up to his feet from his place on the beach, yelling at the water's edge: " Everybody out! " Terrified parents run into the water, pulling their children out as fast as possible. Alex's mother frantically calls over and over again for her boy in a similar way the dog owner was calling for his dog earlier. The camera cuts to the yellow lilo washing up on the shore with a large chunk torn out of it. The calmness of the waves washing over the lilo serves as an anticlimax and as a reminder of the sharks strength and reality of the situation making it all the more emotional.