

Jaws college essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Peter Benchley's novel Jaws was inspired by the Jersey shore shark attacks in 1916. The 1975 horror-thriller was directed by Steven Spielberg who was a very inexperienced director as this was his first major film but he proved himself to be a quality director. This was also the first ever film to utilise the "wide release" method of distribution, many cinemas all over the USA premiered "Jaws" at the time. This followed a huge advertising campaign that raised interests in the film so much that the movie was the first in history to gross over the \$100 million mark in box office profits alone.

The film is set in Amity Island and focuses upon the deadly attacks of a great white shark on the members of the public. The film is set over the 4th of July weekend, this creates conflict between the mayor and the protagonist police chief Brody. This conflict is created when the flood of innocent and happy tourists coming to Amity island are expecting to go to the beach, which is accepted by the mayor however chief Brody who is filled with fear and anxiety knows that there is a deadly shark loose in the waters. Also the fourth of July is a national holiday for Americans were they celebrate their freedom from Britain, but the celebration is inhibited by the oppression caused by the killer shark.

In this film, Steven Spielberg uses music to build tension before the shark attacks. Firstly when the Universal logo comes up there is a strange non-diegetic sound of the sea along with the wind to immediately place the audience in a place of worry and fear. The audience is put into this state because of the wind; the sounds are unusual which makes the audience scared. After the universal logo has been displayed the film starts by plunging the audience into total darkness where the strange sound continues

creating an atmosphere of wilderness and apprehension for the audience. Then the movie cuts to a point of view shot, presumably from the shark's eyes.

This scene is set in shallow waters and in daylight, which subconsciously shows the viewers that the shark is fine with swimming in prime human swimming conditions. The “ Jaws” theme tune also plays during the single shot; Spielberg uses this to teach the audience to associate the non-contrapuntal music and the point of view shots with the shark. The white font of the title (Jaws) was chosen purposely so that the evilness of the shark isn't so obvious to the audience, although the colour white still gives the feeling of mystery. The first attack scene starts with a lengthy tracking shot, showing a large group of teenagers having a quiet relaxing beach party. The scene is set at night time, which in fiction signifies evil, with the sea in the background. With the audience already knowing that this film is about sharks, they are now expecting to see a shark attack in this scene.

They are now wondering who it will be that will get attacked and as the tracking shot continues across the group it stops on one man who is looking away from the group, the audience are now led to believe that it is him who will be attacked as the shot as stopped on him and some importance must follow this. However then we can see that the man is staring at a girl who we later learn to be called Christie. The audience now believe that it is this girl who is going to be attacked, because of the fact that she is sitting away from the group. She is also framed off centre, this is a common media convention and creates unease in the audience due to the human nature of liking things to be symmetrical. It is soon apparent that Steven Spielberg has cast Susan

Backlinie (the woman who plays Chrissie) to be a figure of human innocence and freedom- she is a beautiful blonde haired, blue eyed girl.

This makes the audience feel connected to her because of her good looks. The director has carefully used the mise en scene in the subsequent high-angle shot to show Chrissie as the only person at the party who is outside the group. The teenagers are sat in a circle around the fire- which has connotations of warmth and safety- though there is an obvious gap in this “circle of life”- where Chrissie was meant to have sat. This relates to the hunting patterns of all sharks, that they single out their prey as the one target outside the safety of a group.

In this very same camera shot is also the first glimpse of the dark surface of the nearby water, with the contrapuntal/digetic sounds of waves breaking on the beach. Chrissie and the man both run off together in the direction of the waterline; the way he pursues her like a predator chasing its prey foreshadowing the actions of the shark. The audience build a bigger connection with Chrissie when we are told her name and the way that she speaks in an angelic tone that radiate innocence. Despite the fact that the man is clearly too drunk to swim, Chrissie carries on into the water, Spielberg evidently following at least one of the traditions of the horror genre: the victim must willingly put themselves into danger. A wide- angle shot makes it clear to the audience that the timing has now drifted into dawn, which Spielberg done purposely knowing that most shark attacks on humans occur at dawn. We can also see from this shot that the only thing on the surface of a huge expanse of sea is Chrissie looking tiny and vulnerable.

A medium-close up shows Chrissie's happy face just before cutting to a point of view shot from beneath the water. Again Spielberg flouts media tradition when he uses low-angled shots to show the shark's view, normally more powerful entities look down on minor beings. The dramatic irony (the audience knows the shark is there though the characters do not) created by this drastically increases tension and fright as through the shark's eyes the audience see it get closer to the figure of the surface. The "Jaws" music begins, which Spielberg does to teach the audience that this music means that a shark attack is about to happen. The tune gets more intense before a long drawn-out violin note accompanies another medium- close up of Chrissie.

This time we can see fear and confusion on her face as the unseen shark bumps into her. The audience can then see the mighty power of the shark, as it grabs Chrissie and throws her around. The only sound we can then here are the digetic sounds of her screams and splashes, which Spielberg does to create a more realistic and frightening effect. Chrissie manages to grab onto the buoy before being ripped off and dragged under into the utter silence (more evidence of the shark's power as it rips her of the buoy). The buoy is used to symbolise her tombstone and the scene ends with a shot of the buoy.

Suspense, tension and fear caused by the attacks is gradually developed by the director, with each attack becoming more gruesome, and revealing more about the shark's size and power. The build up to each attack also increases, with emotions such as fear and relief, as well as media devices like music, being used to add tension and anxiety within the audience. In the second

attack scene we are introduced to a new character called Alex. This is the first scene where we see people playing in the water after the first attack on Chrissie.

The scene starts with Alex walking out the sea with his small boat, after he has pleaded with his mother to let him go back in the water, again fulfilling the tradition of willingly going into danger. Chief Brody is also shot in this scene as very anxious. All of this was captured in one continuous tracking shot accompanied by the heightened diegetic and contrapuntal sounds of the sea and beach goers. The actual attack is largely developed by introducing blood. It fountains up as Alex is being eaten, the sudden violence coming as a surprise as well as a shock to the audience.

This attack scene as also progresses from that of the first where we saw no blood or no sight of the shark. During this attack scene we can't see the shark but the audience are shown blood and furthermore the ferocity of the shark. This is again more evidence that with each attack the scene is more gruesome and more revealing of the shark's size and power. The third attack scene is unique to all the others due to the factor of relief.

This is caused by a large build up to a shark attack (low-angled point of view shots and zooms being fully utilised) which reaches an anti-climax when it is discovered to be a hoax. A distraught woman then raises the possibility that the shark is in the river estuary- this generates sudden anxiety in the audience because this was where Brody sent his son to be protected in case of the shark being in open water. The Jaws music plays for the first time in the scene to tell the audience that this is a real attack; in hindsight it

becomes obvious that the first panic was a hoax due to the lack of the Jaws music. Spielberg uses the attack itself to really put power of the shark on show, making it capsize a small boat and devour its occupant in front of the audience.

This attack is hugely significant to the film as it is the first time the shark is seen in the whole movie. This is again more evidence that with each attack the scene becomes more gruesome and more revealing of the shark's power and size. In all attacks Spielberg personalises each victim by naming them or giving them likable characteristics: Chrissie, Alex (an innocent child), a kind boater who tries to help some children and finally Quint (a brave main character). By making the audience relate to victims personally it intensifies the emotions such as suspense they feel, which can allow for greater manipulation. Throughout the film the director has used various media devices in order to create suspense, tension and fear in the audience.

Specialised camera shots-tracking, panning and shots from different angles for example- were used to show attacks from different perspectives and to build up apprehension by revealing visual details via the mise en scene. The Jaws theme music and the shark point of view shots were introduced to forewarn the audience of its presence. Editing also took an important role, with quick-fire cuts being used to create panic, and slower one's distaining the audience's disbelieve. Finally the individual attacks developed as the movie progressed, introducing a new factor each time- the first attack formed a base on which to build upon, the second added to this by involving blood, the third offered a clear view of the shark's colossal head and the film culminates with Quint's and the shark's death.