



Jaws (1975) Adapted from Peter Benchley's 1974 novel.

Director: Steven Spielberg, then only 27

Certificate: A (1975) 12A (2022)

Run time: 134 minutes

If you liked this, you might also like (for suspense and different approach to soundtrack): *The Keep* (Michael Mann 1983), *The Birds* (Hitchcock

1963), *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993).

Jaws didn't just change cinema — it *created* modern blockbuster culture. Previously, studios had avoided the summer as their least profitable period and tended to offer re-runs and independent films. Steven Spielberg's breakthrough thriller fused classical suspense filmmaking with a new era of wide-release marketing. For the first time a film was released to the maximum number of possible screens in one opening weekend, to capitalise on a huge TV (an unprecedented \$700k) and print advertising campaign and designed to begin a snowballing process of word-of-mouth and critical response that would keep the film in cinemas. Although originally released in Summer 1975 in the US, *Jaws* didn't reach the UK until Boxing Day and without such mass release tactics, only in London cinemas. The film toured the provinces in 1976, but Louth had to wait until 1977!

Reviews:

Roger Ebert, doyen of film critics in the Chicago Sun-Times: "One of the most effective thrillers ever made."

Peter Bradshaw 2012: "Here it comes, looming back out of the water: a restored print of Steven Spielberg's serial-killer masterpiece from 1975." (1)

Key Performances:

- **Roy Scheider** as Chief Brody — the anxious everyman at the film's centre.
- **Richard Dreyfuss** as Hooper — energetic, witty, and scientifically minded.
- **Robert Shaw** as Quint — a larger-than-life presence whose wartime experience, shapes the film's emotional core.
- **The Atlantic Ocean** as itself. Look out for filming with water-level point of view.

There were hiccups in production; the original budget was \$4M but the film eventually cost \$9M but the commercial success was (and is) immense. The first run took around \$200M worldwide. The appeal of the film has endured and the total box-office has more than doubled since.

"I never would have guessed that so many people would have gone to see *Jaws*. In my mind, the shark looked dumb," Spielberg admitted to *W Magazine* in 2023. "When I went to the first preview, in Dallas, and people were screaming and popcorn was flying at the screen, my first feeling was—Oh my god! I didn't think any of this was going to work. The truth is; you never ever know."

Jaws came early in the 50+ year, 30 movie collaboration between Spielberg and composer John Williams (it started with *Sugarland Express* the previous year and has continued to *Disclosure Day* in 2025.). The shark's two-note leitmotif is now one of the most recognisable cues in film history. Spielberg later joked that "half the success of *Jaws* belongs to John Williams."

The next three holders of all-time top-grossing movie also featured John Williams scores: *Star Wars*, *ET* and *Jurassic Park*, but while these scores feature big tunes and lush orchestration, *Jaws* is notable for the use of silence (perhaps a reference to the book's original title "Silence in the water").

Filming at sea caused delays due to weather: the original shooting schedule of 55 days was extended by over 100 days. The two animatronic sharks, called "Bruce" by the crew, cost \$500,000 but failed to work reliably in seawater (2). According to some accounts this resulted in the decision to make the shark, unseen, but implied, for much of the film. Roger Ebert relates an alternative story that when producers Richard Zanuck and David Brown first approached Spielberg with an offer to direct, he said he would do it on one condition: that the shark be unseen for the first hour (3). Whatever the reason, the shark is only visible for a few minutes. It makes one wonder if the easy availability of CGI today would have resulted in a less frightening film. The effect on audiences noticeably reduced beach tourism that year and for some time after (some resorts introduced unnecessary but cosmetic shark protection measures!). The film also brought about a frenzy of shark hunting. Marine conservationists have long criticised the film for this - sharks are important top predators, supporting ecosystem diversity, but very rarely attack humans. Spielberg has expressed remorse over *Jaws*—even though it sealed his major-league status as a director, while he was still in his 20s. "I regret the decimation of the shark population because of the book and film." Author Peter Benchley echoed this in a 2006 interview (4): "Knowing what I know now, I could never write that book today," he said. "Sharks don't target human beings, and they certainly don't hold grudges." he dedicated decades of his life to shining a light on shark conservation.

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jun/14/jaws-review>
2. <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/how-a-technical-fault-led-to-the-huge-success-of-jaws/>
3. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-jaws-1975>
4. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-feb-13-me-benchley13-story.html>

Also see:

The Making of JAWS (1975) The Shark Is Still Working Documentary:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=the+making+of+jaws+documentary&&mid=01A801E25EAB42D7BA5D01A801E25EAB42D7BA5D&churl=https%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fchannel%2fUCVBN104jDJ8pubZyD2fWUBw&FORM=VAMGZC>

... and a plethora of other documentaries... and books (e.g. "The making of the movie JAWS" by Edith Blake)