

JAWS

Question – Analyse the way that the director builds suspense in the film “Jaws”.

The film “Jaws” was directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Peter Benchley. The film made in 1975 and is set on the East Coast of USA in New England, north of New York. The film is about a shark which starts to attack people. The first attack is at night when the shark attacks a lone female swimmer. After that the police become involved and this is where we meet the main character, Chief Brody. We see him at home with his family. He is in a new area with a new job but he is afraid of the water. We then meet Quint – a local fisherman and shark hunter who wants \$10,000 to kill the shark. We also meet Hooper who is an oceanographer who is keen to investigate. The climax of the film is when the three men go out together to finally hunt down and kill this huge shark.

Spielberg is very clever in the title sequence. He uses the shark as the camera and the shark’s presence is made known by the music (played by strings just a mere two notes G# and A) this is repeated throughout the film. The scene starts off happy and relaxing at a beach party with people drinking and smoking joints. Then a woman gets up and goes in the water for a swim. The camera goes through the water as if it was the shark. We see the woman from a low camera angle then the woman gets eaten. This creates suspense as we did not see the shark.

Before the second attack Brody watches the water. It is an unusual shot because we see him in profile. They give Brody a close-up which tells us that he is separated from the community and he is the only who knows about the shark. They then show him watching the water again. This time it shows us he is concentrating and highlights the fact he is on watch. The camera then starts to jump cut and when the camera gets nearer it

suggests he is jumpy and that danger gets nearer. Then he sees a man in a black hat swimming. This is shown at a mid shot and is designed to create suspense and make you think it's the shark. Shortly after we get music of strings playing two notes (the same at start) and an low angle underwater shot of legs. We, the audience, have now realised that the music means the shark is near. Suddenly the attack does happen in the distance. We see the flotation device the kid was on and two fins of the shark and spurt of blood from the attack.

After the 2nd attack Brody gives the audience information about sharks through his research. The film slows down after the 2nd attack. Fear of the shark is built up before the next attack we are also introduced to the other main characters Quint and Hooper. Before the next attack the community thought the problem was solved because they caught a shark. After a few drinks Brody and Hooper go out to sea but Brody is scared. Hooper goes under the water and finds a rotten boat, a shark tooth and a dead body and when he sees the body he drops the tooth.

Then the 4th of July came and this is America's independence day a public holiday with lots of visitors. We see visitors news reporters and armed police so the shark can't get to the people in the water but people were too scared to go in the water. The mayor encouraged an old couple to go in the water then everybody went in the water when we see a shark fin heading towards the beach. The police surrounds it and it's two boys playing a joke with a cardboard fin. Shortly after the fake attack we hear music and see a another shark fin heading towards Brody's son who is in the pond in a boat then an older man asks them if they need help in another boat then the shark capsized the man's boat and killed him. We then see an image of an leg falling through the water and Brody's son coming out of the water.

In the second half of the film we mainly see 3 men on a boat Brody Hooper and Quint we already know about Brody and Hooper but not a lot about Quint and when they all have a drink Hooper and Quint start showing their scars to each other and Quint explains a story about the USS Indianapolis. During World War 2 the USS Indianapolis delivered a nuclear device (atomic bomb) to Hiroshima in Japan and on their return journey the Japanese torpedoed the USS Indianapolis. 1,100 crew members came off

the vessel and only 316 got back to land. This was mainly due to the sharks eating the men they ate about 6 men an hour.

The most effective part of the film for me is when Hooper goes down into the water in a cage and nearly gets killed by the shark. To scale up the size of the shark in this scene they got a small man in a small cage to go under the surface of the water. To make the footage of the sharks look bigger than normal, this is the only time in the film where they use real sharks. The imagined length and weight of the Great White shark is 25 feet and 3 tonnes. When the shark comes onto the boat at the end of the film the shark looks unreal like it is but they keep it there for a long time so we can gather that it is unreal and it makes the movie seem unreal.

In conclusion, I would say that the first half was the better half for it seemed more real other than the other half where you see a fake shark. The special effects in the film seem outdated compared with most modern films. However, by not showing the shark in the first half of the film, Stephen Spielberg manages to create and maintain suspense, which increases fear for the audience.