



The Cove

Lesson Plan

Synopsis

The Cove begins in Taiji, Japan, where former dolphin trainer Richard (Ric) O'Barry, Founder/Director of Dolphin Project has come to set things right after a long search for redemption. In the 1960s, it was O'Barry who captured and trained the five dolphins who played the title character in the international television sensation "Flipper."

But his close relationship with those dolphins - the very dolphins who sparked a global fascination with trained sea mammals that continues to this day - led O'Barry to a radical change of heart. One fateful day, a heartbroken O'Barry came to realize that these deeply sensitive, highly intelligent and self-aware creatures so beautifully adapted to life in the open ocean must never be subjected to human captivity again. This mission has brought him to Taiji, a town that appears to be devoted to the wonders and mysteries of the sleek, playful dolphins and whales that swim off their coast.

But in a remote cove, surrounded by barbed wire and "Keep Out" signs, lies a dark reality. A small group of fishermen use the hidden cove to slaughter and capture pods of wild dolphins. With help from an "Ocean's Eleven" style team, Ric will uncover the truth about what is really happening in the small town of Taiji.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will evaluate several topics including dolphin hunting, dolphin captivity, animal rights, and risks to public health.
- Students will consider how characteristics of wild dolphins are used against them in annual hunting tactics.
- Students will respond to discussion points in the film both orally and in written format.

- Students will make observations and draw conclusions about the effects of keeping dolphins in captivity.
- Students will be able to identify the supply and demand relationship in the film pertaining to captive dolphins.
- Students can make connections from the film to similar ideas, providing evidence to support those connections.
- Students will be able to sequence and summarize events in the film.
- Students can explain how film/media uses design techniques to influence the purpose of the film.
- Students can write responses to the film and provide evidence from the film to demonstrate understanding.
- After viewing the film, students can generate similar research topics on captivity or dolphin hunting, formulate open-ended questions, and generate a plan to gather needed information from a variety of resources.

Teacher Notes

This study guide has been divided up into sections based on the most pressing topics presented in the film. Students can be divided up into groups that focus on one topic and then present their findings to the class, or each student can do the entirety of the lesson plan. After the film has been watched and this lesson plan completed, students can continue their work by picking a topic of interest related to *The Cove* and researching it further for either a written essay or a class presentation.

Section 1 - Dolphins

In this section students will discuss the characteristics of dolphins and their role in our oceans. They will compare and contrast wild dolphins and captive dolphins. Students will also consider which setting they would rather live in.

Questions

1. Name at least 5 facts about dolphins.
2. What are 3 differences between wild dolphins and captive dolphins?
3. What role do dolphins play in our oceans?

4. If you were a dolphin would you rather live in the ocean or in captivity? Explain your reason.

Section 2 - Dolphin Captivity

In this section we discuss the past and present situation surrounding dolphin captivity. Students will discuss Ric O'Barry's past involvement in the capture and training of dolphins and then his transition into wanting to end all dolphin captivity. Students will also discuss what captivity means to a dolphin and if they have ever been to a dolphin show and how it impacted them.

Questions

1. Discuss some of the reasons you believe Ric O'Barry changed his feelings towards dolphin captivity.
2. What does captivity mean to a dolphin? How do you think dolphins feel when they are being taken from their families in the ocean to be put into captivity?
3. Have you ever been to a dolphin show? How did it make you feel? Do you feel differently about that experience after watching *The Cove*?
4. Discuss what you think the future of dolphin captivity is and/or should be.

Section 3 - Dolphin Hunting

In this section students will discuss the issue of hunting wild dolphins. In the film dolphin hunting is presented as a part of local tradition and students will discuss if that is enough of a reason to continue. Flipper, and the start of the dolphin captivity industry did not begin until the 1960's, so the capturing of wild dolphins in Taiji is not a part of that traditional practice. Students will determine how the dolphin pods are impacted by the dolphin hunting as well.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the act of hunting wild dolphins? Explain your reasoning.

2. How does tradition fit into the act of dolphin hunting? Can traditions change and evolve? Are there other traditional acts that used to take place that don't anymore?
3. How do the hunting methods affect the dolphin pods? Discuss the banger poles and dolphin echolocation/sensitivity to sounds.
4. How do you think the dolphins are impacted by the hunting? Discuss how that impact pertains to both being slaughtered and taken captive.

Section 4 - Public Health Risks

In this section, students will discuss the public health risks mentioned in the film. Mercury poisoning is a big concern to some residents of the town of Taiji. They have seen other areas in their country be impacted negatively by consuming mercury. Students will discuss these risks and how it would affect their lives if they lived in Taiji, or a similar town.

Questions

1. What is mercury poisoning? How does one become affected by mercury?
2. What would you think about eating food that was contaminated that way?
3. Discuss if you think the local officials should be giving information about mercury poisoning to the residents.
4. How do you feel about the rising levels of mercury in our oceans? Discuss the risks to our environment and the animals.

Post-Film Discussion

Teachers may choose to address these questions in a whole class discussion, or in small groups. These may also be essay-type questions.

After seeing *The Cove*, do you support dolphin captivity? Explain your reasoning.

Do you think there is any compromise that could be made between activists and the town of Taiji?

What are some problems with continuing the dolphin hunts?

What was the biggest thing you learned from watching *The Cove*?

Follow Up Activities

Have students reflect upon the film by writing a response about the biggest impression the film left upon them. Have them explain their reasoning.

Have students write a letter to the town of Taiji about giving their opinion about the annual dolphin hunts. Have them explain how the film made them feel.

Have students make posters or literature that inform others about captivity. They could display and share these outreach items by hosting an informational table at the school or a local market.