

Great Scene: "Jaws"

It's the antithesis of "show it, don't say it"... and it flat out works.

[Scott Myers](#)



Monologues are common with stage plays, but not so much with movies. Of course, "motion pictures" are primarily a visual medium — *motion pictures* — so dialogue, while important, is a secondary form of communication cinematically. However, great dialogue can transcend the adage, "show it, don't say it." And perhaps nothing better exemplifies that point than this great scene in the movie *Jaws* (1975), screenplay by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb, based on the novel by Peter Benchley.

Brody and Hooper at the table, Quint at the wheel, keeping his eye on the light.

QUINT

He's up again.

He corrects course slightly to keep the barrel buoy in sight. Hooper is sitting at the table, morose. Brody is staring at a couple of open cans of beans or beef stew, or some other crappy rations Quint has on board. Dirty spoons stuck in the open cans show us this has not been a formal dinner. Quint fumbles on the chart shelf and produces some of his home brew. He takes a pull, and hands it to Hooper, who takes a double.

Brody touches the fresh abrasion on his forehead, where the fishing rod caught him.

Quint bends forward and pulls his hair aside to show something near the crown.

QUINT

That's not so bad. Look at this:
...St. Paddy's Day in Knocko Nolans,
in Boston, where some sunovabitch
winged me upside the head with a
spittoon.

Brody looks politely. Hooper stirs himself.

HOOPER

Look here.

(extends a forearm)

Steve Kaplan bit me during recess.

Quint is amused. He presents his own formidable forearm.

QUINT

Wire burn. Trying to stop a back-
stay from taking my head off.

HOOPER

(rolling up a sleeve)

Moray Eel. Bit right through a wet
suit.

Brody is fascinated. Quint and Hooper take a long pull from the bottle.

QUINT

Face and head scars come from amateur
amusements in the bar room. This
love line here...

(he bends an
ear forward)

that's from some crazy Frenchie

...that's from some crazy Frenchie
come after me with a knife. I caught
him with a good right hand right in
the snot locker and laid him amongst
the sweetpeas.

HOOPER

Ever see one like this?

He hauls up his pants leg, revealing a wicked white scar.

HOOPER

Bull shark scraped me while I was
taking samples....

QUINT

Nothing! A pleasure scar. Look
here ---

He starts rolling up his own dirty pants leg.

QUINT

Slammed with a thresher's tail.
Look just like somebody caressed
me with a nutmeg grater....

Brody is drawn into their boasting comparisons. He secretly
checks his own appendix scar, decides not to enter the contest.

HOOPER

I'll drink to your leg.

QUINT

And I'll drink to yours.

They toast each other. Brody looks around, sees the strobe
blink once through the darkened window.

QUINT

Wait a minute, young fella. Look.
Just look. Don't touch....

He starts lowering his pants to reveal a place on one hip where
the tissue is scarred and irregular.

QUINT

...Mako. Fell out of the tail rope
and onto the deck. You don't get
bitten by one of those bastards but
twice -- your first and your last.

HOOPER

(considerably drunker)

I think I can top that, Mister....

Hooper is pulling at his shirt, trying to get it off, but it's
tangling its sleeves, and won't come undone.

HOOPER

HOOPER

Gimme a hand, here. I got something
to show you ---

Brody lends a hand. The shirt slips part way off.

HOOPER

(indicating his
chest)

There. Right there. Mary Ellen
Moffit broke my heart. Let's drink
to Mary Ellen.

The two men raise their mugs in a toast.

QUINT

And here's to the ladies.
And here's to their sisters;
I'd rather one Miss
Than a shipload of Misters.

He drinks, Hooper follows.

QUINT

(shows belly)

Look a' that -- Bayonet Iwo Jima.

BRODY

(aside)

C'mon. Middle appendix ---

QUINT

(aside)

I almost had 'im.

Brody is looking at a small white patch on Quint's other
forearm.

BRODY

(pointing)

What's that one, there?

QUINT

(changing)

Tattoo. Had it taken off.

HOOPER

Don't tell me -- 'Death Before
Dishonor.' 'Mother.' 'Semper Fi.'
Uhhh... 'Don't Tread on Me.' C'mon
-- what?

QUINT

'U.S.S Indianapolis.' 1944

BRODY

What's that, a ship?

HOOPER

(incredulous)

You were on the Indianapolis?
In '45? Jesus....

Quint remembering.

CLOSE ON QUINT

QUINT

Yeah. The U.S.S. Indianapolis.
June 29th, 1945, three and a half
minutes past midnight, two torpedoes
from a Japanese submarine slammed
into our side. Two or three. We
was still under sealed orders after
deliverin' the bomb...the Hiroshima
bomb...we was goin' back across the
Pacific from Tinian to Leyte. Damn
near eleven hundred men went over
the side. The life boats was lashed
down so tight to make the bomb run
we couldn't cut a single one adrift.
Not one. And there was no rafts.
None.

That vessel sank in twelve minutes.
Yes, that's all she took.

We didn't see the first shark till
we'd been in the water about an hour.
A thirteen-footer near enough. A
blue. You measure that by judgin'
the dorsal to the tail. What we
didn't know...of course the Captain
knew...I guess some officers knew
...was the bomb mission had been so
secret, no distress signals was sent.
What the men didn't know was that
they wouldn't even list us as over-
due for a week. Well, I didn't know
that -- I wasn't an officer -- just
as well perhaps.

So some of us were dead already --
in the water... just hangin' limp

in the water -- just hangin' limp
in our lifejackets. And several
already bleedin'. And the three
hundred or so laying on the bottom
of the ocean.

As the light went, the sharks came
crusin'. We formed tight groups --
somewhat like squares in an old
battle -- You know what I mean --
so that when one come close, the man
nearest would yell and shout and
pound the water and sometimes it
worked and the fish turned away, but

other times that shark would seem to
look right at a man -- right into
his eyes -- and in spite of all
shoutin' and poundin' you'd hear
that terrible high screamin' and
the ocean would go red, then churn
up as they ripped him. Then we'd
reform our little squares.

By the first dawn the sharks had
taken more than a hundred. Hard
for me to count but more than a
hundred. I don't know how many
sharks. Maybe a thousand. I do
know they averaged six men an hour.
All kinds -- blues, makos, tigers.
All kinds.

In the middle of the second day, some
of us started to go crazy from the
thirst. One fella cried out he
saw a river, another claimed he saw
a waterfall, some started to drink
the ocean and choked on it, and
some left our little groups --
our little squares -- and swam off
alone lookin' for islands and the
sharks always took them right away.
It was mainly the young fellas that
did that -- the older ones stayed

where they was.

That second day -- my life jacket rubbed me raw and that was more blood in the water. Oh my.

On Thursday morning I bumped up against a friend of mine -- Herbie Robinson from Cleveland -- a bosun's mate -- it seemed he was asleep but when I reached over to waken him, he bobbed in the water and I saw his body upend because he'd been bitten in half beneath the waist.

Well Chief, so it went on -- bombers high overhead but nobody noticin' us. Yes -- suicides, sharks, and all this goin' crazy and dyin' of thirst.

Noon the fifth day, Mr. Hooper, a Lockheed Ventura swung around and came in low. Yes. He did that. Yes, that pilot saw us.

And early evenin', a big fat PBY come down out of the sky and began the pickup. That was when I was most frightened of all -- while I was waitin' for my turn. Just two and a half hours short of five days

and five nights when they got to me and took me up.

Eleven hundred of us went into that ocean -- three hundred and sixteen got out. Yeah. Nineteen hundred and forty five. June the 29th.

(pause)

Anyway, we delivered the bomb.

And here's the movie version of the scene:

Incredible delivery by Robert Shaw. Incredible scene.

UPDATE: In comments, Dan Gagliasso wrote [this](#):

Come on guys — it is very well known that John Milius wrote that scene over the phone as a favor for Steven Spielberg. Then Robert Shaw (who was a fine writer himself) cut it down some and made it his own. That credit is given in all of the books on the making of "Jaws" and Spielberg has been very public about giving Milius the credit, as well.

The Milius connection is well-known, indeed, as well as Shaw's reworking of the speech. However that is only part of the story. Here is a direct quote from Spielberg himself taken from a [2011 Ain't It Cool News interview](#):

I owe three people a lot for this speech. You've heard all this, but you've probably never heard it from me. There's a lot of apocryphal reporting about who did what on Jaws and I've heard it for the last three decades, but the fact is the speech was conceived by Howard Sackler, who was an uncredited writer, didn't want a credit and didn't arbitrate for one, but he's the guy that broke the back of the script before we ever got to Martha's Vineyard to shoot the movie.

I hired later Carl Gottlieb to come onto the island, who was a friend of mine, to punch up the script, but

Howard conceived of the Indianapolis speech. I had never heard of the Indianapolis before Howard, who wrote the script at the Bel Air Hotel and I was with him a couple times a week reading pages and discussing them.

Howard one day said, "Quint needs some motivation to show all of us what made him the way he is and I think it's this Indianapolis incident." I said, "Howard, what's that?" And he explained the whole incident of the Indianapolis and the Atomic Bomb being delivered and on its way back it was sunk by a submarine and sharks surrounded the helpless sailors who had been cast adrift and it was just a horrendous piece of World War II history. Howard didn't write a long speech, he probably wrote about three-quarters of a page.

*But then, when I showed the script to my friend John Milius, John said "Can I take a crack at this speech?" and John wrote a 10 page monologue, that was absolutely brilliant, but out-sized for the Jaws I was making! (laughs) But it was brilliant and then Robert Shaw took the speech and Robert did the cut down. Robert himself was a fine writer, who had written the play *The Man in the Glass Booth*. Robert took a crack at the speech and he brought it down to five pages. So, that was sort of the evolution just of that speech.*

Per Spielberg, the U.S.S. Indianapolis speech has its roots in three 'authors': Sackler, Milius, and Shaw. Interesting

backstory for what is in my view the high-water mark for exposition in movies.

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