



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developed by Heartland Truly Moving Pictures to accompany *The Cove*, recipient of the Truly Moving Picture Award, an honored distinction given to films that unlock the vast potential of the human spirit and enable us to view stories that display courage, integrity and hope, taking entertainment to a higher level.

TrulyMovingPictures.org

TakePart.com/TheCove



THE COVE

Introduction

One Film Can

Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *The Cove* is a film that demonstrates that **One Film Can**.

Synopsis

The Cove begins in Taiji, Japan, where former dolphin trainer Ric O'Barry 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 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, glistening cove, surrounded by barbed wire and "Keep Out" signs, lies a dark reality. It is here, under cover of night, that the fishermen of Taiji, driven by a multi-billion dollar dolphin entertainment industry and an underhanded market for mercury-tainted dolphin meat, engage in an unseen hunt. The nature of what they do is so chilling — and the consequences are so dangerous to human health — they will go to great lengths to halt anyone from seeing it.

Undeterred, O'Barry joins forces with filmmaker Louie Psihoyos and the Ocean Preservation Society to get to the truth of what's really going on in the cove and why it matters to everyone in the world. With the local Chief of Police hot on their trail and strong-arm fishermen keeping tabs on them, they will recruit an "Oceans Eleven"-style team of underwater sound and camera experts, special effects artists, marine explorers, adrenaline junkies and world-class free divers who will carry out an undercover operation to photograph the off-limits cove, while playing a cloak-and-dagger game with those who would have them jailed. The result is a provocative mix of investigative journalism, eco-adventure and arresting imagery that adds up to an urgent plea for hope.

The Cove is directed by Louie Psihoyos and produced by Paula DuPre Pesmen and Fisher Stevens. The film is written by Mark Monroe. The executive producer is Jim Clark and the co-producer is Olivia Ahnemann.

THE COVE

Table of Contents

The Cove is a movie that not only sheds light upon the gross mistreatment and slaughter of dolphins by fishermen in a small town in Japan, but also explores the ramifications human actions have on the environment.

This film is a call to action. This guide provides people with the information to act.

Table of Contents

Fact Sheets

Facts About Dolphins	3
Mercury in Seafood.....	4
What's Really Happening in <i>The Cove</i> ?	5

Discussion

Environment.....	6
Activism.....	7
Take Action.....	8

Moving Moments	9
----------------------	---

Following are some fact sheets from “*The Cove* Production Notes.”
Use them to learn more about what is happening in our oceans and in the Taiji cove.

For more information and resources, visit:

TakePart.com/TheCove

Basic Facts

- Dolphins, a member of the cetacea family that also includes whales, have been on earth for about 55 million years. The ancestors of dolphins once lived on land and returned to the sea.
- There are 32 species of ocean dolphin and 4 species of river dolphin.
- Dolphins have larger brains than human beings. Even more impressive, the dolphin brain is more convoluted than a human brain, featuring more “folds” of grey matter, which biologists consider the best evidence of high intelligence.
- Scientists theorize that dolphins need very large brains to use their highly sophisticated sonar, which allows them to essentially “see” with sound.
- Dolphins can hear and communicate in a far larger range than humans can. A dolphin’s hearing ranges from about 75 hertz to over 150 kilohertz, while most humans can only hear a much smaller spectrum of sound, from about 20 hertz to 20 kilohertz. Navy testing of sonic devices has been known to cause damage to the brains of cetaceans miles away from test areas.
- A dolphin can dive up to 330 feet, or about 100 meters, on one breath of air. This is due to their hemoglobin-rich blood which allows them to store more than 10 times more oxygen than most mammals. Compare that to world-champion free diver Mandy Rae Cruickshank, who, through lots of training, can dive to 88 meters.

Dolphins as Social Creatures

- Dolphins are among the most social creatures on the planet, living in family units known as “pods.” Orcas, the largest species of dolphin, stay with their mothers for life (another reason why it is problematic to separate them from their families in captivity.) Scientists have observed bonds between individual dolphins that have lasted a lifetime.
- In the wild, dolphins have been observed aiding sick or injured members of their pod.
- Among all the wild animals on earth, only dolphins have been known to come to a human’s rescue. There are numerous stories of dolphins aiding surfers and sailors throughout history.
- Captive dolphins typically can learn around 90 commands in American Sign Language.
- Dolphin observers have noted that they display a wide range of emotions, including humor and compassion.

Mercury in Seafood

- Oceans become polluted with mercury when atmospheric emissions from coal and industrial plants are transported into the sea. Groundwater contamination is also a source of oceanic mercury.
- A United Nations study in 2003 states that through the burning of fossil fuels, such as by coal and cement plants, mercury is rising in the environment at the rate of 1.5 – 3% per year.
- Mercury builds up in ocean life through bioaccumulation, a process in which repeated exposure to low-level toxins gradually leads to much higher levels of toxins in an organism's tissue over the course of its lifetime.
- Water samples in a 2006 U.S. Geological Survey study showed a 30% increase in ocean mercury levels from 1990s levels.
- One of the worst incidents of mercury poisoning in contemporary history occurred in the Japanese town of Minamata in the 1950s and 1960s. The Chisso petrochemical factory dumped an estimated 27 tons of mercury compounds in the bay, poisoning the fish which the locals eat as the linchpin of their diet. The mysterious illnesses – including numb limbs, slurred speech, palsy and blindness – and birth defects that resulted became known as “Minamata Disease” but were all a result of mercury poisoning.
- Mercury poisoning can damage the brain, kidneys and central nervous system. Infants exposed to high doses of mercury while in the womb are prone to higher rates of brain damage and developmental disorders. Studies have also linked mercury with cardiovascular disease, infertility and high blood pressure.
- 75% of human mercury exposure comes from seafood consumption.

Mercury in Dolphins

- A recent international study showed that, on average, dolphin meat contains approximately 5 times the amount of mercury exposure recommended by organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and other regulating bodies.
- Some samples of dolphin meat have shown mercury at more than 1,000 times the maximum allowable levels. However, there are no known cases of mercury poisoning from eating dolphin meat that have been medically documented.
- Scenes in *The Cove* demonstrate that dolphin meat has been packaged and sold as whale meat, misleading consumers as to its source and toxicity.
- In October 2008, following the filming of *The Cove*, dolphin meat was finally taken off the school lunch menu in Taiji.

Marine Mammals in *The Cove*

- In coastal areas, dolphins are hunted by “drive-fishing” techniques, in which the dolphins are herded and corralled into net cages by loud banging sounds that disrupt their sensitive sonar, causing them to panic.
- Dolphins killed in the Taiji hunts include Bottlenose, Striped, Spotted and Risso’s dolphins as well as False Killer Whales and Short-Finned Pilot Whales. Some of these species are considered endangered.
- The world outlawed commercial whaling in 1986. And yet, dolphin hunts remain legal because, although dolphins and whales are both cetaceans, the members of the International Whaling Commission have not agreed to protect “small cetaceans.”
- Most citizens in Japan are unaware of the dolphin hunts and unaware of the serious toxicity of dolphin meat. However, the Japanese government continues to support dolphin hunting and has successfully lobbied to keep the International Whaling Commission from acting on behalf of small cetaceans.

Dolphins in Captivity

- A live wild dolphin captured for a marine park show can fetch up to \$150,000. A dolphin killed for meat draws about \$600.
- Once a live dolphin is selected for a marine park, aquarium or swim-with-dolphins program, it is separated from its close-knit family unit, hoisted in trucks and planes and transported from the ocean to a far-away pool.
- Dolphins not selected for marine parks are then “sitting ducks” for local fishermen who kill them for the price their meat will fetch. They are typically killed at close quarters with spears, knives and hooks. In the open ocean, they are usually killed with harpoons.

THE COVE

“We have a mission statement, ‘We’re not trying to save the whole planet, just 70% of it.’ ”
***The Cove* Director, Louie Psihoyos**

In *The Cove*, Psihoyos explains he founded the Oceanic Preservation Society because over the last 35 years of diving he had seen the deterioration of oceans, which cover 70% of Earth’s surface. Often people consider the destruction of the environment to be something that occurs slowly and won’t change in their lifetime. However, the environment is changing in measurable ways and it’s up to us to act now.

Discussion Points

- What environmental issue in *The Cove* stood out most to you?
- Were there environmental factors highlighted in the film that you were not yet aware of? What were they and how did this knowledge affect you?
- Do you see environmental changes around you? How has the environment changed in your lifetime and what do you believe you have contributed to this change? Are there things you can do differently to minimize your impact on the environment?
- Did the mercury levels in dolphins and the fact that many Japanese, particularly the school children in Taiji, were unknowingly consuming dolphin meat make you consider the greater picture of where our food comes from?
- How in touch are you with your food consumption? Find resources containing information about mercury levels in fish as well as sustainable and healthy seafood options at **TakePart.com/TheCove**.
- Understand your impact on the environment. For more information, visit The Footprint Network: **FootprintNetwork.org**.
- Ric O’Barry is a tireless activist, working to save dolphins across the globe, although in *The Cove* O’Barry’s efforts are focused on the small Japanese town of Taiji. Find out how you can help at: **TakePart.com/TheCove**.

THE COVE

“I never planned on being an activist, but one thing leads to another.”

Ric O’Barry

Ric O’Barry became involved in *The Cove* due to his passion for dolphins and the responsibility he bears to fix the problem he feels he had a tremendous impact in creating. After being a dolphin trainer on the set of *Flipper* for years, he realized he’d sparked an international demand for dolphins as entertainment. Since then, O’Barry has been working tirelessly as an activist to shed light on the mistreatment of dolphins around the world.

Louie Psihoyos’ passion for the ocean and its inhabitants led him to found the Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS). *The Cove* is the first product of this non-profit organization. The Oceanic Preservation Society is “dedicated to increasing awareness and creating action to improve the condition of our oceans.”

Together O’Barry and Psihoyos, along with a specialized crew, teamed together to develop a film that exposes an important issue and can generate a new group of people to advocate for the cause.

Discussion Points

- O’Barry is brutally honest about what he believes was his role in the rise of dolphin captivity to begin with. Do you believe he had to take the path he did in order to be able to become the activist he became?
- In the film, O’Barry discusses the fine line he must walk as an activist. How do you think O’Barry and his team handled the various confrontational situations with the people in Taiji?
- In *The Cove*, O’Barry states, “I was as ignorant as I could be for as long as I could be.” Are there issues that you know that you can impact, but that you choose to maintain a level of ignorance about to make life less complicated? What are they and did this movie cause you to think about these issues differently?
- The movie shows tremendous teamwork amongst a group of people with varied talents. Did this prompt you to consider how your talents might be something that you can contribute to a cause?
- What issues are important in your life?
- What does *The Cove* inspire you to do?
- What do you want your impact on the world to be?

The following action tips are courtesy of *The Cove's* Social Action campaign.

Save Japan's Dolphins

- Send letters to President Obama, Vice President Biden and the Japanese Ambassador to the United States, asking them to stop the Taiji dolphin slaughter. Go to **TakePart.com/TheCove**.
- If you want more information about what to look for at dolphinariums, swim-with-dolphin programs and resorts that feature dolphins, download the "Learn About Dolphins in Captivity Guide" at: **TakePart.com/TheCove**.

Addressing Mercury Poisoning of Sea Life

- Eat only sustainable, non-polluted seafood. For a list of which seafood to buy and why, find a free downloadable mercury card at **TakePart.com/TheCove**.
- Support alternative fuels that will reduce our use of coal, a leading cause of mercury contamination of waterways. Learn more at the Natural Resources Defence Council: **NRDC.org**.

Conserving Our Oceans

- Learn more about the wild beauty of the ocean and our dependency on its health and complex web of life for human survival. Some good places to start include:

TakePart.com/TheCove

OPSociety.org

SaveJapanDolphins.org

THE COVE

The Cove has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor films released theatrically that align with Heartland's mission to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning films are made up of moving and inspiring moments – those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently, and be inspired to take action. They are what make the film and its message remain with you well after you've left the theater.

Think about *The Cove*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share these moments with others at **TrulyMovingPictures.org**. Simply create a member login, if you don't already have one, and then search the movie list for *The Cove*. You can leave your review or comments about this film in the "Review" section.



The Cove © 2009 Roadside Attractions. All Rights Reserved.