



# Will Sharks Survive This Century?

Should we care that sharks are disappearing from our oceans? Is there anything one person can do to help prevent humans from eating sharks into extinction? *Why I Care About Sharks*, an illustrated and informative book for teenagers by JIS teachers Lisa Cook and Joel Simonetti, explores these vital questions and takes a new look at the wonder of sharks.

*Why I Care About Sharks* shows how sharks are in trouble. "They have been the accidental and intentional targets of fishermen throughout the world for decades," write Joel and Lisa, "and it's taken a toll on their populations. Today the fishing pressure on sharks is so great that they can't withstand it. Most grow slowly mature late and produce few young. Many species, including large well-known sharks, have declines 90 percent in just the last 15 years. And these decreases are on top of already drastic population declines, some which began a century ago. Now a new menace is stalking sharks – a growing taste for sharkfin soup."

In their book, Lisa and Joel use an emotive and persuasive mix of facts and figures combined with their own feelings and fascination for the undersea world: "The water around us was cool and full of plankton. A strong current was bringing this living soup up to the surface. Like whale sharks and basking sharks, mantas are filter feeders and this concentration of plankton had become their feast. Without realizing it, Jackie and I had swum into the middle of the mantas' meals. Several were flying right toward us. For a moment we thought these enormous fish would crash into us, but they always pulled up or veered to one side or another, often passing less than an arm's length away. They knew exactly where we were. Some even seemed interested in Jackie and me

and swam right beside us, letting us stare into their big black eyes.

"In the eyes of these mantas I saw some of my own feelings returned. Whenever I have a chance, I try to look into the eyes of the sea creatures I encounter. In sea turtles I've seen a look of peacefulness, in sea lions playfulness, in dolphins joy, and in an octopus I know, curiosity. My friends who've never experienced this think I'm crazy, yet they have no problem looking into the eyes of their cats and dogs and seeing a look of gratitude or happiness returned to them.

"Thinking about what's happening to sharks and other sea creatures in our oceans, I've searched for a reason to believe things can change for better. I have found one in myself. While governments have limited power to change people's behavior, when it comes to ourselves, we're powerful. Without shouting or writing letters, each one of us can help create a future for sharks and people. We just have to start by eating less sharkfin soup, or better yet, not eating it at all. Next, we need to do our best to explain our reasons for making this decision to our family and friends. If enough of us stop eating sharkfin soup, then fishermen won't catch so many sharks.

"It would be a shame if sharks and other sea creatures became so scarce that we rarely encountered them, expect on the end of a fork, in a spoon, or between

two chopsticks. We don't want to give up the opportunity to look into the eyes of these magnificent animals. I suspect Jackie and I aren't the only ones who want to swim in seas full of mantas and sharks."

*At time of print, nearly 30 schools, mostly in Asia, are using the Why I Care About Sharks materials.*

What died so I could eat this bowl of soup?

## Food for Thought

In 1996 for every 22 swordfish caught in the California driftnet fishery, one dolphin or whale, three sharks and six other fish were killed.

