



The Cove Discussion Guide

Director: Louie Psihoyos

Year: 2009

Time: 92 min

THE COVE is Louie Psihoyos's first feature-length documentary film.

FILM SUMMARY

THE COVE is the combined effort of director Louie Psihoyos and activist Ric O'Barry to expose the truth behind a hidden lagoon in Taiji, Japan where 23,000 dolphins are being taken captive every year. Some dolphins are sold into the entertainment industry—to aquariums and marine parks. The rest are driven into an isolated cove where they are brutally slaughtered, their meat sold in supermarkets around Japan. But because dolphin meat contains dangerously high levels of mercury, Japan's fishery agency began labeling it as whale meat, or sometimes as "fish," illegally subjecting people to toxic meat without their knowledge.

Ric O'Barry was a dolphin trainer and the ex-star of TV show, Flipper. Through his work with dolphins, he learned how intelligent and how emotionally sensitive these creatures are, to the point where they can even commit suicide if life becomes too unbearable. When one of Ric's dolphins committed suicide in his arms, his life took a drastic turn. For 10 years he had built up the dolphin captivity industry, and for the past 35 years, he's been trying to tear it down. Director Louie Psihoyos joins his efforts by assembling a highly skilled team of divers, filmmakers, sufers, and scientists to shed light on Taiji's dark secret. THE COVE is an unforgettable story about one of the most amazing creatures on our planet. It is adventurous, bold, and important.

FILM THEMES

THE COVE stirs up several topics, from ecological crimes and animal rights to public health hazards and governmental deception. Here are some topics to help shape your discussion.

CAPTIVITY INDUSTRY

For centuries, we have looked up to the stars, and asked ourselves: “Are we alone?” No. We are not. To find intelligent life, we can peer into our oceans where dolphins and whales live as social creatures with language, culture, and self-awareness. They feel empathy and perhaps even love. How have we reacted to their presence? We’ve slaughtered them by the thousands. We’ve forced them to perform tricks for our entertainment and caged them in the name of educating ourselves.

MERCURY CONTAMINATION

Mercury is a natural element that humans have exploited for electrical power, plastic production, and other industrial processes. Today, mercury levels in the soil have tripled. In the oceans, mercury levels are 10 times higher. This jeopardizes the environment and our health. We are mass-producing a toxic substance that comes back to us in our food. Existing technologies could remove about 95% of mercury from coal plants, but corporate lobbyists are dismissing the issue as a scare. Corporate profits continue to influence mercury regulations.

OCEANIC ECOSYSTEM

Technology helps us realize that we live in a hyper-connected world. But nature has always been this way—an intricate, delicately balanced ecosystem where each species depends on the other. Humans are now ushering in the sixth great extinction. More than half of the world’s species could be gone by the end of this century. Oceans will be affected most profoundly due to overfishing, pollution and toxicity, climate change, and habitat loss. We don’t know how these changes will affect the human species. But we do know that we are just one part of this amazing, diverse ecosystem.

WILDLIFE HUSBANDRY

Most game parks and biotechnology companies claim that they are saving wild animals from their plight out in the wild where they deal with habitat loss and food scarcity. But in captivity, animals are exposed to intense levels of stress, loneliness, and depression, unnatural routines, and a host of infectious and parasitic diseases that can erupt as they are moved throughout the world and placed in environments where they do not belong.

“A dolphin’s smile is nature’s greatest deception. It creates the illusion they’re always happy.”

Ric O’Barry

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

FILM FACTS:

- Dolphins in the wild travel up to 40 miles per day and spend 80% of their time deep below the surface exploring the ocean's depths. They need continuous movement.
- 53% of dolphins that survive the violent capturing process die within 90 days.
- The average lifespan of a dolphin in the wild is 45 years. Half of all captured dolphins die within the first 2 years of captivity, while the other half live an average of 5 years.
- India has taken a strong anti-captivity stance. The government cites high intelligence as proof that keeping dolphins is morally wrong. Dolphin captivity was also banned by Costa Rica, Hungary, Chile, U.K., Switzerland, Norway, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Cyprus, Croatia and Brazil
- Taiji fisherman started using a new process of killing dolphins, whereby a sharp spike is shoved into their neck behind the blowhole. The wound is plugged up to stop bleeding, and the dolphins continue thrashing for minutes on end. The Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science has confirmed this method as inhumane.
- According to the Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS), Japanese consumers are buying less dolphin meat than ever.
- A dead dolphin can bring about \$600 USD on the Japanese market for its meat. But a live trained dolphin can fetch \$150,000 or more on the global market from dolphinariums that exploit these intelligent animals to do tricks for tourists.
- Without action, global mercury emissions could grow by 25% by 2020, creating health crises and diminished IQ. But implementation of existing pollution-control technology could lower global discharges by up to 60%.
- Ric O'Barry discovered another big dolphin trade in the Solomon Islands where the meat is used for food and the dolphin teeth are used for purchasing brides, which often leads to killing far more dolphins than are needed for subsistence.
- Ric O'Barry and his son Lincoln helped stop dolphin hunting and capture in three villages in the Solomon Islands. But the killing continues in other Solomon villages.
- Director Louie Psihoyos is working on another film called THE HEIST, which addresses the upcoming massive extinction of animals. It's the largest extinction since the dinosaur age ended and the first extinction caused by a single species: humans.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Spread the word and give others an opportunity to learn and make informed decisions.
2. Support [the Oceanic Preservation Society](#) as these dedicated artists, filmmakers and activists strive to raise awareness and protect the oceans. Consider [donating](#) to their cause.
3. Make some noise! Communicate with your government agencies, as well as media people, law enforcement officials, and civic organizations and sign petitions against dolphin hunting.
4. Pledge not to buy a ticket to the dolphin show or a swim-with-dolphins program. Consumers have the power to make or break this industry.
5. Learn more about dolphins: become educated about these amazing, intelligent animals so that you can speak on their behalf. A good place to start is [Dolphins-World](#).

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.