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Reading Passage

Little Great White

by Pamela S. Turner

Moms, dads, and kids crowded around the window at Monterey Bay Aquarium. When a small gray-and-white shark swam by, a woman squealed, "There she is!"

Eight-year-old Sammy gazed up at the shark. He saw the rows of perfectly white, perfectly sharp teeth. "She's really pretty," said Sammy, "but a little scary, too."

The shark was a baby "great white shark." (Scientists call them *white sharks*.) They have a terrifying reputation: Sometimes the sharks attack swimmers, probably because the shark mistakes the swimmer for a seal or sea lion. Attacks on humans are rare. But

many movies make people think that these sharks are monsters waiting to eat them.

The baby white shark at Monterey Bay Aquarium wasn't much of a monster. At 4 feet 4 inches long and 62 pounds, she was about the same size as a nine-year-old girl. But when full-grown, she could reach 19 feet in length and weigh more than 2 tons—longer and heavier than a minivan.

"We are really quite proud of her," said John O'Sullivan of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. "She is a beautiful, fascinating, majestic swimmer."

Can We Keep Her?

Bringing a white shark to the aquarium wasn't easy. For fifty years aquariums have tried to keep white sharks alive, but the sharks would not eat in captivity.

The baby shark had been caught accidentally by a halibut fisherman off the coast of Southern California. Mr. O'Sullivan and his team knew that white sharks

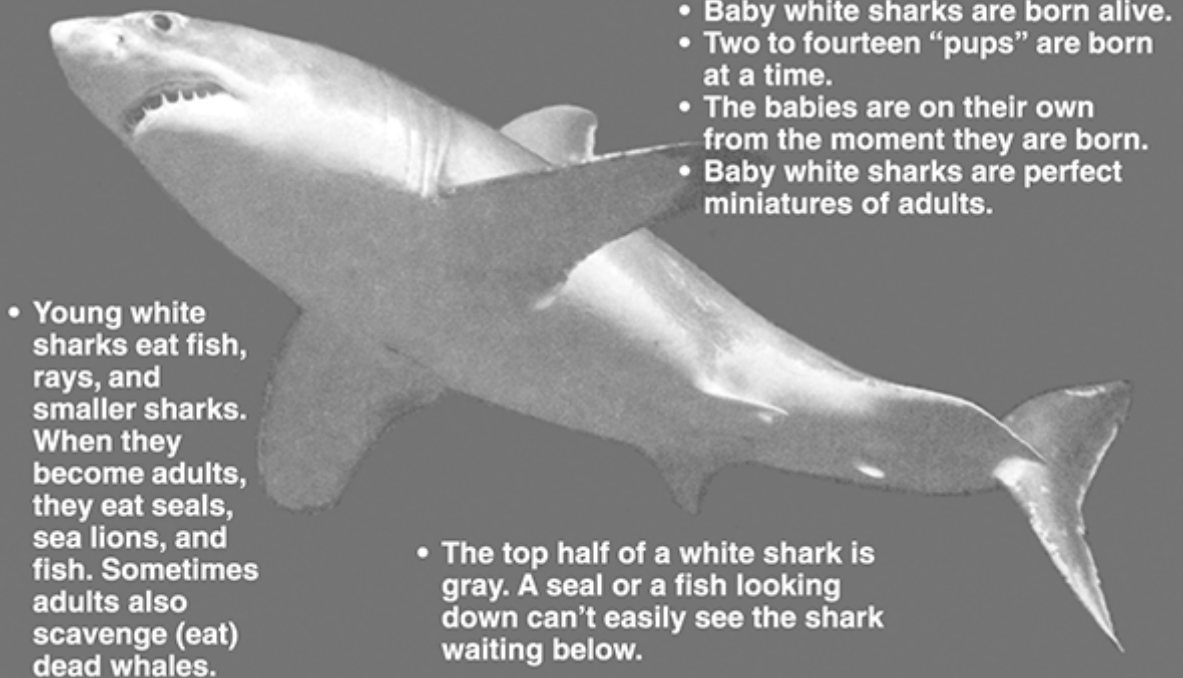


A veterinarian gives the shark a checkup before her trip to the aquarium.

were sometimes caught this way. The aquarium had a special floating pen waiting in coastal waters nearby. While the shark lived in the pen, she was fed the same things she would have eaten in the wild—smaller sharks and other fish. The floating pen helped her get used to living in a small space.

After living in the pen for 26 days, the shark was put into a special 3,000-gallon tank and driven north to the aquarium. She was given a quick health check and slipped into the million-gallon Outer Bay Exhibit tank. The next morning, the shark ate

White Shark Facts



- Young white sharks eat fish, rays, and smaller sharks. When they become adults, they eat seals, sea lions, and fish. Sometimes adults also scavenge (eat) dead whales.

- Baby white sharks are born alive.
- Two to fourteen "pups" are born at a time.
- The babies are on their own from the moment they are born.
- Baby white sharks are perfect miniatures of adults.

- The top half of a white shark is gray. A seal or a fish looking down can't easily see the shark waiting below.

salmon for breakfast. The aquarium staff cheered!

The baby shark was fed using a long pole with a loop at the end to hold pieces of fish. "You slap the food in front of her, get her excited, and she attacks it," explained Mr. O'Sullivan. "When you watch her feed, it is very, very exciting." At one point, she bit the feeding stick and snapped off a piece of it.

A Healthy Appetite

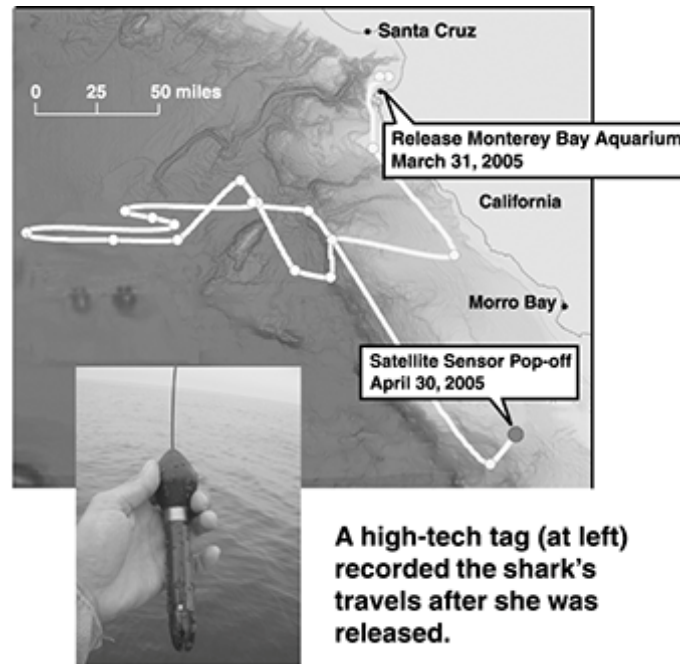
The aquarium staff worried that the white shark might attack her tankmates, such as tuna, sea turtles, stingrays, and soupfin sharks. "We try to make sure everybody in the tank is happy and has a full tummy," said Mr. O'Sullivan. "A few of

the little barracuda nip at her tail. It is sort of like a dog chasing a car. It is probably not a smart thing to do!"

The aquarium staff didn't know how long they could keep the baby white shark. They planned to set her free if she stopped eating. Even if they could keep her a long time, they planned to set her free when she got bigger.

In just six and a half months, the shark grew two feet in length and more than doubled in weight. Scientists were surprised at how quickly she grew.

As the white shark got bigger, she began hunting her tankmates. She bit and killed two soupfin sharks. The aquarium released her into the ocean on March 31, 2005.



A high-tech tag (at left) recorded the shark's travels after she was released.

A Message Home

Before letting her go, scientists attached a special "pop-up" satellite tag to the white shark. A month later the tag automatically popped off the shark, floated to the surface, and sent data to an orbiting satellite.

The tag told scientists that the shark was alive and had swum 200 miles south since her release. This is as close as any shark gets to sending a postcard: "The water is fine. Wish you were here!"

During her stay, the baby shark gave people a more balanced view of white sharks. People fear many animals, such as

lions and grizzly bears. But over time, people have accepted the idea that these animals have a right to exist. We set up national parks to protect them.

Many scientists think that white sharks are very rare and should also be protected. It is now against the law to fish for white sharks off the shores of places like the United States, Australia, and South Africa.

"Having a live, swimming white shark lets people say, 'Wow, this animal is really neat,'" says Mr. O'Sullivan. He hopes that people will begin to understand this magnificent creature. Then they will help protect it.

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Does the box on page 3 called "White Shark Facts" help you understand the rest of the article? Explain your answer using information from both the box and the rest of the article.

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