



GREAT GOLD VS. GREAT WHITE

By Michèle Dufresne

1 In July 2017, the Discovery Channel celebrated Shark Week with one of the strangest races in television history. On one side was a great white shark, one of the fastest creatures in the ocean. On the other side was Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps. It was the ultimate battle: man vs. beast, or, as they called it, “Phelps vs. Shark: Great Gold vs. Great White.”

- 2 From the beginning, it was not a very even matchup. Phelps is seen as the greatest swimmer of all time, but his best recorded speed is 6 miles per hour. Great white sharks have been recorded swimming as fast as 25 miles per hour, more than four times faster than Phelps’s record. On top of that, the ocean was much colder than the pools where Phelps trained. To even the playing field, Phelps wore a custom wetsuit that reduced drag. It even had a fin that mimicked the shark’s powerful tail.
- 3 Who would win? The swimmer with 39 world records and 28 Olympic medals or the most feared predator in the ocean? Anticipation was high. Millions of viewers tuned in to watch the race.



- 4 The course was set up in the Atlantic Ocean, just off the city of Cape Town in South Africa. To people who watched the race on television, it appeared that Phelps and the shark were swimming side by side, but in fact, Phelps swam by himself to keep safe from the shark. Divers circled around him at all times, keeping an eye out for predators. After Phelps had completed the race and was out of the water, it was the shark's turn. The producers set the shark in the water and filmed it swimming the same 100-meter route. They aired the footage together on television, so it looked as if the two swimmers were racing at the same time.
- 5 Phelps maintained the same steady rate through the race. He swam in a straight line and finished in just over 38 seconds, beating his personal 100-meter record at the time.

The shark moved at a slower pace but had brief bursts of great speed. Sharks can move extremely fast, but they do not usually swim for long distances. When the shark stopped or swam in another direction, the producers lured it back toward the finish line with a fake seal. In the end, it reached the finish line in 36 seconds, just barely beating Phelps. It leaped out of the water at the finish line, making a massive splash.

- 6 Even though he didn't win, Phelps says he enjoyed the whole experience, calling it "one of the most exciting two weeks of my life." And as for a rematch, Phelps is willing to try again, though maybe in a different location. "Next time . . . warmer water," he says.



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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1) What does the word *mimicked* mean as it is used in the following paragraph?

From the beginning, it was not a very even matchup. Phelps is the greatest swimmer of all time, but his best recorded speed is 6 miles per hour. Great white sharks have been recorded swimming as fast as 25 miles per hour, over four times faster than Phelps's record. On top of that, the ocean was much colder than the pools where Phelps trained. To even the playing field, Phelps wore a custom wetsuit that reduced drag. It even had a fin that **mimicked** the shark's powerful tail.

- a) imitated
- b) ridiculed
- c) concealed
- d) exposed

2) How does the author organize the race events in paragraph 5 in the passage?

- a) problem and solution
- b) comparison
- c) cause and effect
- d) description

3) If a great white shark can swim four times as fast as a human, why did millions watch the race?

- a) Michael Phelps was a gold medalist swimmer and believed he could swim faster than a great white shark.
- b) Viewers knew it would be thrilling to watch an Olympic medalist race against a great white shark.
- c) Michael Phelps wore a custom wetsuit that had a fin that made him look like a great white shark.
- d) Viewers knew Michael Phelps had a chance to win because he was a steady swimmer who could swim in a straight line.

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Test Questions (continued)

- 4) Why did the producers of the show film Phelps and the shark swimming separately but then show the two swimmers racing at the same time?**
- a) They wanted to prove the shark could swim faster than Phelps.
 - b) They wanted to safely compare a shark and a human in a swimming race.
 - c) They wanted to prove Phelps wasn't as fast as a shark.
 - d) They wanted to lure the shark back toward the finish line with a seal.
- 5) Which statement provides the best summary for paragraph 5 in the passage?**
- a) Michael Phelps beat his personal 100-meter record while the great white shark had to be lured back on course with a fake seal.
 - b) The great white shark won the race and made a giant leap out of the water, which made a massive splash.
 - c) The great white shark won the race because he was more accustomed to the cold water.
 - d) Michael Phelps swam at a steady rate while the great white shark had great bursts of speed that gave it a two-second win over Phelps.