

FROM ACADEMY AWARD®-NOMINATED AND EMMY®-WINNING FILMMAKER LIZ GARBUS



"A **dazzling dive** into the depths of an **undersea world**."
IndieWire

"swift moving, detailed biography... an **inspirational** example of **passion** harnessed to a **noble** purpose."
The New York Times

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC | DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Becoming Cousteau

The Extraordinary Life of the Ocean's Great Protector

Streaming Nov 24
Only on



DISCUSSION GUIDE



NATIONAL
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presents

a Story Syndicate production

in association with

The Cousteau Society & ACE Content

Becoming Cousteau

Directed by Liz Garbus

Produced by
Liz Garbus, Dan Cogan, Mridu Chandra, Evan Hayes

Written by
Mark Monroe & Pax Wasserman

Edited by
Pax Wassermann

Executive Producers
Julie Gaither, Carolyn Bernstein, Ryan Harrington

Run Time: 96 minutes

[FILM WEBSITE](#)



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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I'm very happy to share my new film, **BECOMING COUSTEAU** with you. My intention was to provide an inside look at the life of explorer, filmmaker, and beloved adventurer Jacques-Yves Cousteau, his iconic films and inventions, and the experiences that made him the 20th century's most unique and renowned environmental voice. I hope you enjoy.



Liz Garbus

As I began this film, just the fact that Cousteau himself is not a household name seemed extraordinary to me. Today's generation has grown up with popular nature programs that highlight the oceans and sea life, and it's extraordinary to recall just how mind blowing it was to actually see for the first time, every week in the 1970s, all of the undersea wonders that Cousteau filmed. It took a great mind, tremendous bravery, and a pioneering spirit to do what he did – revolutionize undersea filmmaking – and today, we are surrounded by imagery and technology that exists because of him! Not only did he use his brand-new technology to popularize science and important environmental issues, he also created a style of storytelling that has now become ubiquitous on TV.

It was funny to hear Cousteau say he never wanted to call his films documentaries – “That sounds like something you’d see in science class!” He thought it made them seem like lectures. He called them ‘adventure films,’ and that’s what they were. He took us all on a high-seas adventure and showed us the majestic beauty of ocean life. As a filmmaker working in the documentary form for some years I wonder if, given today’s offerings and breadth of documentary cinema, he might feel a little differently.

Famously, Cousteau said that people will only protect what they love, and that was the greatest gift he gave us—he showed us the sea and inspired us to love all that was in it, and in doing so, he created generations of conservationists. In

some ways Cousteau was an accidental environmentalist, coming to understand the dangers to the fragile underwater ecosystems he loved so dearly through first-hand experience. For example, when he began his undersea explorations he took financing from oil companies to finance the Calypso and her crew. It was only through his decades-long experience diving and filming that he came to understand the potential dangers of these activities and, when he did, he used his enormous platform and celebrity to sound the alarm to the general public.

In 1991, Cousteau's tireless efforts to preserve the Antarctic resulted in a historic agreement by the United States and 26 other nations to leave that continent untouched for 50 years and prohibit mineral resource activities. In Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Cousteau and The Cousteau Society helped make possible the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development – also known as the Earth Summit – which brought together 170 nations and Cousteau was seen in conversation with world leaders from Castro to Bush. At that time he was one of the most recognizable faces on the planet – the person Americans said they would most want to meet other than the President – and because of his influence and celebrity he was able to bring world leaders together. His celebrity and popularity enabled a growing global awareness of the preciousness and precariousness of the undersea world.

Cousteau said in Rio, in 1992, "You have an extraordinary opportunity to change the course of the world...but only if you decide to challenge the huge problems with radical solutions." His message is even more urgent today, almost 30 years on. At the end of the day, the future of our species and the survival of huge swaths of biodiversity on the planet will depend on innovation and commitment in the spirit of Cousteau.

– Liz Garbus

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Thank you for sharing **BECOMING COUSTEAU** with your community of schools, students, youth, lovers of the environment, social impact organizations, and loved ones. This guide has been designed to help navigate viewers through a conversation about their thoughts, emotions, and reactions to the film. It contains information about the documentary, essential themes, discussion questions to explore, as well as activities and resources to deepen engagement and impact.



Underwater pioneer, Jacques Cousteau, guides his latest underwater research vessel for an expedition to study the Caribbean's teeming sea life. National Geographic sponsored the expedition. (Thomas J. Abercrombie/ National Geographic)

FILM OVERVIEW



Jacques Cousteau aboard Calypso on a 1963 expedition in the Red Sea. (Credit: National Geographic)

Adventurer, filmmaker, inventor, author, unlikely celebrity, and conservationist: For over four decades Jacques-Yves Cousteau and his explorations under the ocean became synonymous with a love of science and the natural world. As he learned to protect the environment he brought the whole world with him, sounding alarms more than 50 years ago about the warming seas and our planet's vulnerability. In **BECOMING COUSTEAU**, from National Geographic Documentary Films, two-time Academy Award®-nominated filmmaker LIZ GARBUS takes an inside look at Cousteau and his life, his iconic films and inventions, and the experiences that made him the 20th century's most unique and renowned environmental voice – and the man who inspired generations to protect the Earth.

[WATCH THE TRAILER](#)

JACQUES-YVES COUSTEAU FACTS

Throughout Cousteau's 87 years of life, he was a French naval officer, an explorer, an innovator, and an author.

In 1930, Cousteau joined the French Naval Academy in pursuit of a career in aviation and air exploration but sustained an injury that led him to rehabilitation. This setback would lead to Cousteau's interest in ocean and sea exploration.

Cousteau's documentaries were beloved in both the environmental and artistic worlds. In 1956, he won the coveted Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival –the first documentary to do so – with his film, "The Silent World."

In 1973, The Cousteau Society was established to advocate for endangered water species and to educate those interested in preserving all bodies of water around the world.

In the 1980s, Cousteau was a pioneer of alternative energy. After years of studying how to design a new complementary wind-power system he launched a new ship utilizing his invention – the Turbosail.



Jacques Cousteau wears his iconic red diving cap aboard his ship Calypso, circa 1970s. (Credit: The Cousteau Society)

In the early 1990s, Cousteau launched a worldwide petition campaign, *The Bill of Rights for Future Generation* to save Antarctica from mineral exploitation, resulting in an extraction ban on the continent through 2050.

Cousteau and Emile Gagnan invented the modern demand regulator device that was used in diving practices. This invention created the opportunity for the creation of the self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA).

Cousteau created awareness for all audiences to learn about endangered species through his marine research. Two of his award-winning films – *The Silent World* and *World Without Sun* – were centered around many endangered species including various types of fish and whales.

Cousteau’s seminal filmmaking work happened onboard (and underneath) Calypso, a primary vessel for exploration and a former Royal Navy minesweeper that had been converted to a ferry. Cousteau had Calypso for 46 years.

All four of Cousteau’s grandchildren are involved in environmental advocacy. Alexandra Cousteau and her brother, Philippe Jr., founded the youth-focused nonprofit Earth Echo, while siblings Céline and Fabien have directed and produced countless documentary nature programs.



Jacques Cousteau on expedition aboard the Calypso, 1960. (Credit: National Geographic/Luis Marden)

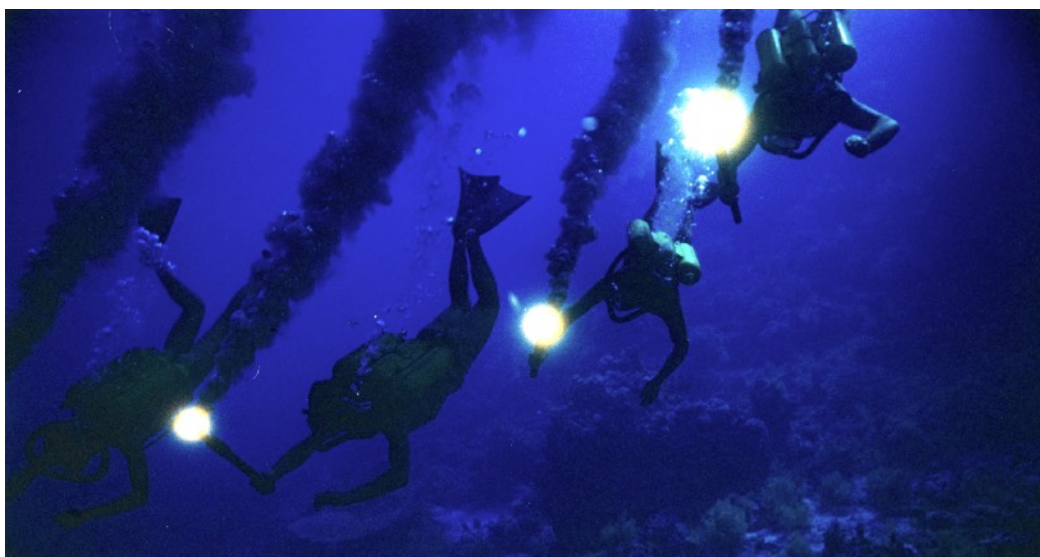
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your biggest takeaways from the **BECOMING COUSTEAU** documentary?
2. What did you learn about Cousteau's work and life?
3. Did your opinion of him change after seeing the film? If so, how?
4. Cousteau's intersectional approach to life allowed him to pursue many passions at once which opened his eyes to how we're all connected and how he could use what he learned to benefit others. What are some of your own passions? How do your passions intersect with one another?
5. What are some inspiring moments in the documentary that may have impacted the way that you want to follow your own passions?
6. What are your thoughts about climate change? Are you aware of its effects on the area where you live (i.e., town, city, state, country)?
7. What are some actions you can take to combat climate change?
8. Cousteau took much risk and was able to uncover new discoveries that pushed science and the field of oceanography forward. In what ways do you think Cousteau's contributions have made science and technology better today?
9. How can we use technology to learn more about the Earth? How can we teach others about how to value and sustain its resources?
10. Cousteau was greatly worried that the destruction of the environment would lead to the extinction of underwater species. After watching the documentary and given today's concern about climate change, how would the extinction of all underwater species affect you?

ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

The **National Geographic Society** is transforming the learning experience for young people and the educators who reach them with the tools, resources, and support they need to feed their curiosity and become the explorers of tomorrow. **Our resource library** contains hundreds of ocean activities.

For more than 25 years the **Disney Conservation Fund** has supported the protection of oceans and marine life, with more than \$17M invested in projects spanning the coastlines and oceans of 50+ countries.



*Calypso crew members dive in dark waters while filming a scene for The Silent World.
(Credit: National Geographic/Luis Marden)*

NAUI Dive Centers and Dive Destinations are recognized as operations of excellence for diver training and safety. NAUI Affiliates enjoy the benefits of a member-driven system of products and supports designed to help your business succeed. Click the link above to learn more about diving and requirements to receive your certification. E-learning opportunities are available.

Visit an aquarium or zoo accredited by the **Association of Zoos and Aquariums** to learn more about marine life and discover how you can make a difference where you live to help protect our oceans.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL TEACHER OR CONNECTED TO SOME?

National Geographic Society's **professional learning opportunities** provide unique experiences which connect educators, Explorers, and young people. We help you build knowledge, develop leadership skills, and cultivate empathy – to inspire generations of global citizens who continuously seek and implement solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

Consider joining the **National Science Teachers Association** to have access to educational resources for students of all ages to receive current information on science and technology.

National Earth Science Teachers Association inspires passion for stewardship and sustainability of Earth through a collaborative community of Earth and Space Science learning for all.

SUPPORT THE RESEARCH AND OTHER EFFORTS OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY:

The **National Geographic Society** uses the power of science, exploration, education and storytelling to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world. We fund a global **community of Explorers** who investigate, test hypotheses, innovate, stretch their creativity, and push the boundaries of traditional thinking in ways that fundamentally change our world. We maximize impact in five key areas, including oceans. Join us at **www.natgeo.org**

National Geographic Explorer in Residence Enric Sala and a team of determined scientists, storytellers, and policy experts launched the **Pristine Seas** project in 2008 to explore and help inspire the protection of the world's ocean. Together, they are working to inspire the creation of protected areas where marine life can thrive – while ensuring effective management for years to come. Over the last twelve years, Pristine Seas has carried out expeditions in 31 places, 24 of which have since been protected, covering a total area of more than 6 million square kilometers – more than twice the size of India.



Jacques Cousteau on a 1970 dive while filming an episode of *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. (Credit: The Cousteau Society)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. **The Cousteau Society** has been exploring the seas, establishing protected areas for endangered species and advocating for the silent world which cannot advocate for itself, since 1973.
2. **The Endangered Species Coalition** was established by Philippe Cousteau, the Grandson of Jacques Cousteau. The mission of the organization is to stop the human-caused extinction of our nation's at-risk species, to protect and restore their habitats, and to guide these fragile populations along the road to recovery.
3. **Earth Echo International** works with partners across the world, engaging young people to make an impact in sustainability and conservation. Earth Echo was founded in honor of Philippe Cousteau Sr. by his widow, Jan and their children, Alexandra and Philippe.
4. **Wildlife Conservation Society**'s goal is to conserve the world's largest wild places in 14 priority regions, home to more than 50% of the world's biodiversity.
5. **Hopkins Marine Station (Stanford)** shares a list of resources for careers in marine or aquatic sciences.
6. **Women Exploring Oceans** profiles women in oceanography.
7. **Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence** is part of a National Science Foundation (NSF) network created to foster scientists' involvement in ocean science education.
8. **5 Ways Jacques Cousteau pushed to protect the planet**: From advocating for coral reefs to blowing the whistle on nuclear dumping, the work of the legendary ocean explorer and conservationist is recognized in a new documentary.
9. **What visual storytellers owe Jacques Cousteau** examines the misfortune that led to Jacques Cousteau's innovations.

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Simone Cousteau, early diving pioneer and wife of Jacques Cousteau, dives near a grouper fish in the Indian Ocean. (Credit: National Geographic/Luis Marden)