

Who Speaks for the Animals?

by Rachel Howard



It was just another hot day during a humid summer in New York City. The beaches were crowded with families, and the air-conditioned subways promised a welcome respite from the heat, that is, until a woman entered a northbound train just after midnight and was confronted by an odd smell. When she looked around the train, she noticed something lying on the floor under one of the seat banks. "I board a car that's not terribly full," she is reported by the publication *Gothamist* as saying, "and as soon as I enter, a stench hits my nose. It's not the typical...urine/trash smell...it's...fishy? I look down to the end of the car to see a dead shark on the floor."

Questions swirled online and in the news: Where did this shark come from? How had it gotten onto the subway? How had it died? It was a curiosity that stumped anyone who'd heard about the strange incident. Photographs popped up online of the gray creature, which was about four feet long. Spectators posed the shark in a variety of ways: one of the more popular images that circulated online was a photo of a MetroCard—a card allowing entrance to the subway—on the floor next to the shark, as if it had entered the subway voluntarily.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), responsible for the care and maintenance of the New York City subway system, was luckily equipped to deal with the deceased shark. It is reported that at Queensboro Plaza, a major transportation hub, the MTA authorities ordered everyone off the train in order to handle the situation at hand. What to do with a dead shark? The MTA authorities disposed of the body.

Still, the questions remained unanswered. Even though the subway train was clean and fishy stench-free, many in New York continued to wonder what had happened to the shark and how it ended up on a subway. Due to the amount of attention the story received online and on television news, someone

was sure to come forward with the story of how the shark ended up taking a ride on the N train.

Some questions were finally answered when a woman recognized the shark in pictures from the subway as the same shark her kids had taken pictures of that same day, after it had washed ashore on Coney Island, a beach at the bottom tip of Brooklyn. Her neighbor's daughter had even picked up the corpse for a photograph. Images of the shark hanging in the air, held by a brown-haired girl in sunglasses, began to appear online, corroborating the woman's story.

Apparently the shark had washed ashore sometime in the afternoon, and it was already deceased. Beachgoers showed intense interest in the small shark, taking pictures and congregating around it for a time. After a while, someone picked it up and took it to Luna Park, the amusement park located just north of the beach at Coney Island. It was left on the ground by the old wooden roller coaster, when apparently someone else decided to take it home and instead, left it on the subway.

This incident brings a number of issues to light, not only about the shark and its death, but about the way city dwellers think of and act toward wildlife. To a certain extent, the appearance of a wild animal, even a dead one, is an exciting and unusual occurrence in a city. The desire to photograph it, play with it, even to take it home is, on some level, understandable—where else in a city of millions of people can one experience a creature from the marine wild in a similar way? Aquariums and zoos, in protecting the animals that live in their sanctuaries, rarely, if ever, allow visitors to handle the animals.

At issue too is the sad disregard for an animal's death that was exhibited by the people who played with its corpse. The question, "What would you do?" begs to be asked. We are told not to approach or ever touch a wild animal, even if it looks friendly. It could be carrying disease or ready to attack, no matter how sweet it appears to be. Why do we not have a similar approach to dead animals? When does it become okay to disturb wildlife? Even the photographs that were posted on the Internet in some way disturbed the death of the shark, who was taken all over the city rather than left on the beach and in the ocean where it belonged.

What remains to be seen is whether there will be any public outcry about the situation: who will speak for the animals?

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What was found on the New York City subway?

- A. a jellyfish
- B. a dead shark
- C. a hamburger
- D. a bag of money

2. What does the author argue in the passage?

- A. Wildlife can be a distraction in New York City.
- B. The MTA should have disposed of the shark in a better manner.
- C. People should have taken pictures with the dead shark.
- D. People exhibited disregard for the shark's death.

3. Subway goers were surprised by and interested in the dead shark on the train. What details from the text support this statement?

- A. The shark was found on the N train.
- B. The MTA ordered everyone off the train so that they could dispose of the shark.
- C. People took pictures of the shark and posted them online.
- D. The shark was already dead when it had washed ashore.

4. Read the following sentences: "At issue too is the sad disregard for an animal's death that was exhibited by the people who played with its corpse. The question, 'What would you do?' begs to be asked."

How does the author feel about the treatment of the dead shark?

- A. unhappy
- B. indifferent
- C. supportive
- D. surprised

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. the Metropolitan Transit Authority
- B. wildlife near Coney Island
- C. the role of social media in the news
- D. a dead shark and how New Yorkers reacted to it

6. Read the following sentences: "Some questions were finally answered when a woman recognized the shark in pictures from the subway as the same shark her kids had taken pictures of that same day, after it had washed ashore on Coney Island, a beach at the bottom tip of Brooklyn. Her neighbor's daughter had even picked up the corpse for a photograph. Images of the shark hanging in the air, held by a brown-haired girl in sunglasses, began to appear online, **corroborating** the woman's story."

What does "**corroborating**" mean?

- A. imitating
- B. confirming
- C. destroying
- D. disproving

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

We are told not to approach or touch a wild animal, _____ many people picked up the dead shark and played with it.

- A. yet
- B. so
- C. before
- D. namely

- 8.** How did the dead shark get on the subway? Outline its route from the ocean to the subway train.

- 9.** Why were spectators so interested in the dead shark?

- 10.** Was it wrong for people to carry around the dead shark, play with its corpse, pose with it, and post pictures of it on the Internet? Why or why not? Support your answer with details from the text.
